

HOW PROFESSORS THINK

INSIDE THE CURIOUS WORLD OF
ACADEMIC JUDGMENT

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3/ On Disciplinary Cultures

The “gulf of mutual incomprehension” that Sir Charles Percy Snow famously posited as separating “scientists” from “literary intellectuals” also separates many social scientists from humanists, as well as many interpretative from more positivist researchers.¹ Long before they come to sit on funding panels, scholars absorb a variety of beliefs and perceptions about disciplinary cultures, especially each field’s approach to producing and evaluating knowledge.² They become familiar with these differences through intellectual activity—graduate training, mentoring, reading within and outside their fields, and so on—as well as through the formal and informal activities of everyday life at colleges and universities. One panelist I interviewed, an analytical philosopher, playfully sums up some prevailing stereotypes this way:

Philosophers are known to be rigorous more than anything else, right? People in English seem to value a kind of ability to look at the underside of literary texts and see not so much what they are

saying, but what they're not saying. In philosophy that is considered completely useless, whatever. In art history, some want to be on the cutting edge of every last French philosophical movement and be able to bring Lacan, Deleuze, Baudrillard, and Bourdieu into their discussion of the arts.

The differences in epistemological styles that this philosopher lampoons frequently fuel the divisive debates that occur across (and in some cases within) academic disciplines. By "epistemological styles" I mean preferences for particular ways of understanding how to build knowledge, as well as beliefs in the very possibility of proving those theories.³

In their quest for a monopoly on truth or science, social scientists and humanists often succumb to polarizing stances, arguing that there is only one correct approach to both theory and method.⁴ In terms of theory, disciplinary preferences range from the view that authors should acknowledge how the formulation of their theoretical orientation is shaped by their own social location, identity, and political orientation, to the view that theories emerge from the observation of new evidence in light of existing explanations, without being affected by who the researcher is or how she apprehends her object.⁵ The range with regard to methodological preferences is no less wide. Some disciplines emphasize hypothesis testing and privilege the role of formal models for proving theories; others vehemently reject such approaches in favor of a contextual or narrative method.⁶

This chapter identifies some widely accepted views that academics hold about the evaluative and epistemic culture of their own field and those of other fields. Such sets of conventions influence how disciplines define quality and recognize it. They include "inquiry beliefs" and "theoretical attachments" regarding, for instance, the proximity of fields to the natural sciences, the usefulness of reductionist

approaches and strategies, and the roles of empirical data and theory.⁷ Moreover, they include beliefs about whether academic excellence is "real" or located in the eye of the beholder, whether consensus can be reached, and what might ground it. They also encompass debates over standards, the role of theory, consensus in a field, the ability to judge, the importance of disciplinary boundaries, and the significance of subjectivity in the pursuit of knowledge.

Disciplinary differences are not only part of the funding panel experience, but also are at play in academic life more generally. As stereotypes, these differences often serve as grounds against which members of disciplines define themselves relationally, that is, in opposition to other disciplines. And like all stereotypes, disciplinary stereotypes are reinforced by lack of contact with the "other."⁸ The frequency of interaction across disciplines typically is low, owing to the strong departmental structure of academia, the growing demands on faculty time, and the exigencies of keeping up in one's own field. Thus a consideration of disciplinary evaluative cultures is crucial for understanding the behavior of funding panels (as well as higher education more generally). The picture of disciplinary temperaments that emerges here is very different from that offered by Richard Whitley, who focuses on variations in dependency and task uncertainty across the disciplines.⁹

The discussion in this chapter draws on several sources. One is what individual panelists say—inchoate, unreflective responses as well as well-considered, theorized positions—about differences in disciplinary cultures and about how standards vary across disciplines. I focus on six of the eleven disciplines that the study's respondents hail from. These fields are roughly distributed on the humanities/social science and soft/hard axes, and include 75 percent of my respondents.¹⁰ In order of presentation, the disciplines are philosophy, English, history, anthropology, political science, and economics. Because the social science competitions I studied are somewhat

more humanistic than the social sciences as a whole (this is especially true of the SSRC and the WWNFF competitions), the anthropologists I interviewed are more likely representative of their discipline than are the political scientists and economists. This bias is unavoidable since I was unable to gain access to the more scientific social science panels, such as those of the National Science Foundation, where panel members from economics and political science probably are closer to their disciplines' "mean."¹¹ An important balancing factor here is that my description of each field, in addition to being informed by what their members say about it, reflects the perceptions of members of other disciplines, incorporates my own experience and exposure to these fields, and draws on broader analyses made by scholars who have studied academic life. I also benefited from discussion with and feedback from a range of experts from various fields.

Perceptions of disciplinary differences in panel deliberations. Representations concerning disciplinary differences are significant because they provide one of the frameworks through which members of multidisciplinary panels make sense of their roles and responsibilities. An anthropologist sketches the basic evaluative procedure this way:

Before the meeting, you as a reader find something in a proposal that speaks to you or doesn't speak to you. And then you hopefully are able to convey some of that to the rest of the group . . . What you wind up doing is advocating or explaining to other people why something is a good project. And when other people are listening, as they were this time, then it's not so hard to come to an agreement.

Since by definition most of the participating scholars on an interdisciplinary panel come from different academic fields, members

cannot count on others sharing their theoretical or methodological preferences. In order to be "able to convey" to colleagues "why something is a good project," a panelist needs to mount a case using arguments that others will be receptive to—that keep "other people . . . listening." Or, stated more broadly, what academics perceive as being the key cognitive conventions among all the various disciplines influences which characteristics of a proposal are accentuated (or downplayed) during deliberation. Which arguments are made, in turn, increases the likelihood that some proposals will be eliminated along the way, depending on the disciplinary make-up of a committee. A detailed content analysis of panel members' responses to interview questions shows that in making their proposal evaluations, they generally draw on one or more of the following epistemological styles, which my colleagues Grégoire Mallard, Joshua Guetzkow and I have dubbed constructivist, comprehensive, positivist, and utilitarian.¹²

The comprehensive style values *verstehen*, attention to details, and contextual specificity in proposals. As in Max Weber's comprehensive sociology, this style supports historically and culturally sensitive social science and humanistic research.¹³ It is the most widely used style, mobilized by humanists (86 percent), historians (78 percent), and social scientists (71 percent).¹⁴ (Historians are considered a separate group because of this discipline's hybrid status between the social sciences and humanities.) The constructivist style emphasizes proposals that "give voice" to various groups. It values reflexivity, that is, consideration of the impact of the researcher's identity and commitment on his analysis. It appeals to anti-positivists whose research is politically or socially engaged. It is most popular among humanists (28 percent) and historians (29 percent); it is favored by only 14 percent of the social scientists. The positivist style favors generalizability and hypothesis testing. It is used most often by social scientists (57 percent) and, to a lesser extent, by historians (23 percent); none of the humanists mobilize this style in their evaluation.

The utilitarian style resembles the positivist style, but it values only the production of instrumental knowledge. This is the least popular style. It is used by only 4 percent of the historians, 19 percent of the social scientists, and none of the humanists.

Disciplinary cultures and definitions of excellence. The definitions of excellence that panelists employ in evaluating proposals are influenced by their individual proclivities, and by various facets of their identity and of their intellectual and social trajectories. The epistemological criteria that panelists value most in judging proposals also often resonate with the definition of excellence that prevails in their specific discipline. As we will see in Chapter 4, multidisciplinary panels often loosen this association, giving preference to those criteria of evaluation valued in the discipline of the applicant rather than in their own discipline (a practice termed “cognitive contextualization”). Thus the interdisciplinary character of the competition affects disciplinary arguments and shapes how panelists go about convincing one another of a proposal’s merits (or lack thereof).

But how is the goal of finding and rewarding excellence understood across disciplines? This chapter presents evidence of disciplinary variations in the extent to which panelists believe academic excellence exists (although serving on a funding panel signals a baseline commitment to the possibility of identifying some form of excellence); agree on what defines excellence; and believe that excellence is located in the object of evaluation (that is, the proposal), as opposed to the eye of the beholder (in the intersubjective agreement that emerges from negotiations among panelists). These variations can be explained in part by the epistemological culture of the field—the extent to which scholars understand criteria of evaluation as valid per se or as expressing and extending power dynamics (“whose standards are they, anyway?”). Fields such as English literature and anthropology, where post-structuralism has been influential and the

“theory wars” have been fought, are more likely to take a relativistic stance toward evaluation, as well as to have a weaker consensus on what defines quality.

Disciplinary cultures of excellence are also likely to be influenced by demographic factors: these reveal patterns of growth and decline, which may reverberate on levels of consensus within a discipline. Over the past thirty years, students have fled the humanities, as well as the softer social sciences, for more practical majors such as business and computer science.¹⁵ Figure 3.1 presents data on the number of PhDs awarded per field between 1975 and 2005. English, history, and political science experienced an important decline in degrees granted between 1975 and 1985. After 1995, these disciplines rebounded (to varying degrees) and stabilized or slightly increased until 2005. In the late 1970s, economics suffered from a less acute decline than the other fields (except for anthropology), and has shown continuous growth since, as have history and political science. Perhaps not coincidentally, economics and history are the two disciplines where scholars appear to have the most consensus concerning what defines quality. English, the only field to show a decline in PhDs granted between 1995 and 2005, is also the discipline where the very concept of academic excellence has come under the greatest attack. Of course, figures on the number of PhDs granted per discipline are not a conclusive indicator of the vitality or status of fields, and I do not present these data as evidence of a one-to-one correspondence between disciplinary status, market-strength, and consensus.¹⁶ I do, however, see the association illustrated by Figure 3.1 as highlighting one of a constellation of conditions that sustain—or fragment—disciplinary consensus regarding the pursuit of knowledge and the associated question of how to define and evaluate excellence.¹⁷

In the context of peer review panels, one of the most vivid indicators of disciplinary differences is the place that evaluators accord to subjectivity in the pursuit of knowledge. Here the gulf of mutual in-

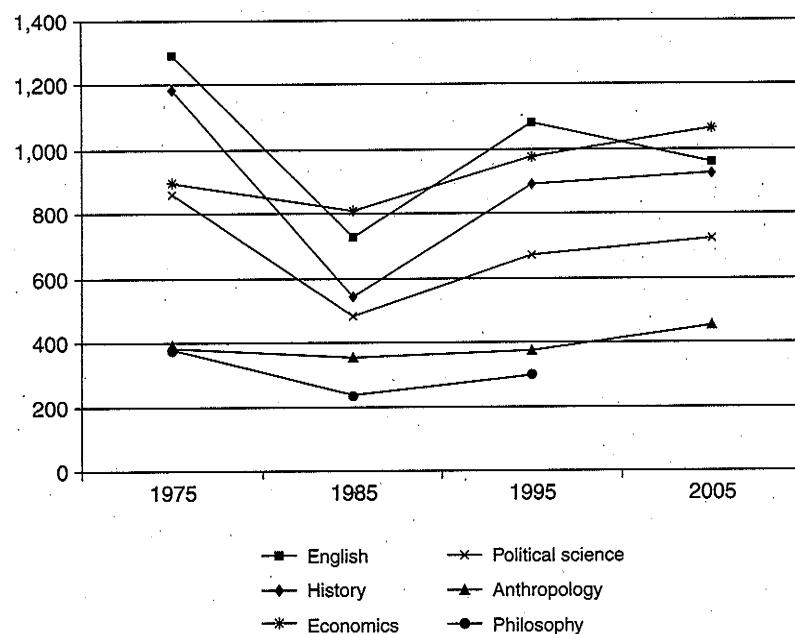


Figure 3.1 Number of PhD degrees given in selected disciplines, 1975–2005. Yearly data on the number of PhDs granted from 1975–2005 in the fields of English, history, economics, political science, and anthropology are taken from the *Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED)* conducted by National Opinion Research Center. See National Opinion Research Center (2006); Hoffer et al. (2006). Data on the number of PhDs granted from 1975–1995 in the field of philosophy are taken from two reports by the American Philosophical Association (APA): information for 1975 and 1985 is from “Degrees Awarded in Philosophy by U.S. Universities, 1949–1994” and information for 1995 is from “PhDs in Philosophy by Gender/Race/Ethnicity.” The number of philosophy PhDs awarded in 1975 and 1985 was obtained by averaging the number of PhDs granted in 1974–1975 and 1975–1976, and the number of PhDs granted in 1984–1985 and 1985–1986. Since the *SED* data are obtained through a government research project and the APA data are taken from a survey conducted by a professional association, there may be some discrepancy in coding. Note that the APA has not yet compiled or released data on PhDs in philosophy after 1996.

comprehension finds most social scientists on one side and most humanists on the other.

Interpretative and Empirical Disciplines

Humanists often define interpretative skills as quintessential for the production of high-quality scholarship. Social scientists, especially those who champion empiricism, more often deride interpretation as a corrupting force in the production of truth. This basic distinction directly affects how humanists and social scientists evaluate proposals. Some humanists rank what promises to be “fascinating” above what may turn out to be “true.” An English professor describes a proposal in the following terms: “I was just compelled by the sort of careful way in which she mapped this out, and my thing is, even if it doesn’t work, I think it will provoke really fascinating conversations. So I was really not interested in whether it’s true or not.” Another panelist, a literary scholar who also supported this proposal, put originality above empirical soundness, explaining, “You can never prove anything.” Such skepticism toward the concept of truth is more rarely voiced in the social sciences. Several panelists from political science, for instance, stressed traditional standards of positivism. One, noting that he thinks of himself as “a scientist, but in a very broad conception of that term,” offers this description of the standards he uses to evaluate scholarship:

Validity is one, and you might say parsimony is another, I think that’s relatively important, but not nearly as important as validity. It’s the notion that a good theory is one that maximizes the ratio between the information that is captured in the independent variable and the information that is captured in the prediction, in the dependent variable. [Also g]eneralizability across different historical epochs, not across extraordinarily different societies . . . systematic knowledge I think is important, too, so that you can be

shown to be wrong. In other words, to have disconfirmable knowledge.

For this panelist, the ability to replicate results is crucial. "Otherwise, what one is doing is a personal expression . . . what is interesting [about the work of scholars he admires] is not about their own view of the world, but about the world itself." Not all social scientists share this conception of subjectivity ("of the personal") as a corrupting influence on the production of knowledge, however. Much in line with standard practices in high energy physics and other scientific fields, there is a strong tendency in some quarters of the social sciences to acknowledge the role of interpretation and induction in research and to point out the researcher's back and forth movement between theory and empirical analysis (sometimes pejoratively termed "data massaging").¹⁸

Much like the gulf between the humanities and the social sciences, this split within the social sciences, between those fields where empiricism is more exclusively favored and those where interpretation is considered an essential ingredient, also influences panel deliberations. An anthropologist describes sociologists, political scientists, and economists as tending to emphasize "theoretical models" and "statistical framework[s]," whereas anthropologists and historians "put more emphasis on language proficiency, knowledge of the culture, spending time in the place you're researching." A sociologist elaborates on these distinctions:

Sociology, political science, economics people share one set of criteria, and the people from anthropology and history share different criteria. Anthropology and history are much less positivistic, much more comfortable with single cases. Whereas the political science, sociology, [and] economics representatives want multiple cases and stronger research design. They are less comfortable with

a proposal that looks like it just wants to tell an interesting story . . . Anthropologists and historians are much more inductive in their approaches, much more sort of "empirical dirty hands," to a degree. Certainly much less inclined to [the] sort of typical deductive kind of process that you run into in introductory classes in sociology, for example . . . Political science is relatively narrower for what passes for acceptable science than sociology . . . on the dimension of do you need to be hypothesis-testing or theory-generating, as opposed to just engaging in interesting storytelling.

In addition to separating "generalizable theory" from "story-telling," academics frequently distinguish between the pursuit of pure versus applied knowledge. Some view the social sciences as having an applied dimension and the humanities as contributing to "the production of meaning," and to being "ultimately about the kinds of questions people ask of a range of kinds of texts." An anthropologist invokes this distinction to explain his preferences in scholarship:

I'm not the kind of person who tries to reduce a highly complicated social situation to a one-sentence synthesis . . . I'm much more interested in looking at the multiple layers and complexities of human social experience . . . I don't see myself as being somebody who's going to come up with a unified theory of all human life; I'm not particularly interested in doing that. So in a way, I guess my leaning is much more humanistic than is conventional in social science.

History, even more than anthropology, defies consistent categorization. Whether panelists consider the field as belonging to the humanities or to the social sciences depends largely on the place they accord narratives and theory in their own work. The social sciences have had a huge influence on history over the past forty years, and

increasingly, historians follow William Sewell Jr. in arguing that history offers theory (about social change, for instance) to other fields.¹⁹ Yet others, although also interested in theory (of the literary or cultural studies varieties), often identify themselves as humanists. The turn toward quantification in the 1970s also pushed history toward the social sciences.

By examining several disciplinary evaluative cultures individually, we can see that academics in each discipline consider that much is at stake in how their field is defined and understood, from within and from without.

The "Problem Case" of Philosophy

Four of the panels I studied included a philosopher and considered philosophy proposals. On two panels, philosophy emerged as a "problem field," seen as producing proposals around which conflicts erupt. Accordingly, some program officers warned panelists of the special difficulty of building consensus around such proposals and encouraged them to stay "open-minded" toward them. Such cautions and requests came as close to a plea for "affirmative action" toward a discipline as I witnessed during my study of funding panels.

Several panelists expressed at least one of the following views: (1) philosophers live in a world apart from other humanists, (2) nonphilosophers have problems evaluating philosophical work, and they are often perceived by philosophers as not qualified to do so, (3) philosophers do not explain the significance of their work, and (4) increasingly, what philosophers do is irrelevant, sterile, and self-indulgent. These views—especially the second—are problematic because the smooth functioning of multidisciplinary panels depends on all members' willingness to engage with other disciplines and to practice cognitive contextualization, thus assuring that each proposal is evaluated using the criteria most valued in the proposal

writer's discipline.²⁰ Later, I suggest that views of philosophy as a "problem case" can be traced to aspects of the evaluative culture of the discipline.

Princeton philosopher Alexander Nehamas notes that American philosophers think of their field as a "second order discipline," superordinate to all other disciplines, because it investigates the claims made by other fields.²¹ This in turn fosters a propensity among philosophers to see their field as uniquely demanding. This view can lead them to conclude that only philosophers are truly competent to evaluate philosophy proposals, an attitude that challenges the very possibility of multidisciplinary evaluation. A philosopher on one of the four panels expresses this view very clearly. He asserts that not all panelists are qualified to evaluate philosophy proposals because, like mathematics, philosophy presumes special skills that many panelists lack.²²

Philosophy requires the ability to make analytic distinctions, the ability to clarify a position or an argument to a degree that hasn't been done before, a certain kind of rigor in working through the implications and details of a position and a mastery of the details but at the same time, a sense of the larger scale significance of detailed arguments and positions in the larger landscape of philosophical issues.

This understanding of the field as promoting a unique "rigor" and incisive clarity in arguments reflects the dominance of analytical philosophy as an intellectual style.²³ As a second philosopher explains, "Philosophy differs from other disciplines because there's much more of a sense of argumentation or debate . . . When you give a paper in philosophy, you give a paper and then you have an hour of people trying to find what's wrong with it. [The debates are] very clear, obvious, and not at all, so to speak, elegant." By contrast, "in

English or in comparative literature . . . the discussion is of a very different sort. I think it is, generally speaking, less ruthless." This ruthlessness—this toughness—may be a manifestation of philosophy's view of itself as one of the most exacting of disciplines. In trying to account for the fact that among all the projects selected for funding, "the philosophy proposals are the ones that need to be explained," another philosopher stresses, "Philosophy projects are by and large very, very difficult to understand." Along the same lines, the website of the American Philosophical Association states that "no other discipline is more attentive to the cultivation of intellectual conscience and of critical acumen."²⁴ Particularly in interdisciplinary settings, actions that reflect these field-specific characteristics may be interpreted by nonphilosophers as a form of misplaced intellectual superiority or as an inappropriate attempt to enhance disciplinary status.

Philosophy's "very autonomous" position in the humanities is another potential source of trouble on interdisciplinary panels. A historian observes that "it's very hard to find a philosopher . . . who has any common ground of discussion with the rest of the world." A geographer summarizes his panel's frustration with evaluating philosophy proposals with the remark that philosophers "produc[e] absolutely unintelligible research proposals, and so we just didn't know how to deal with them." Put differently, the philosophy proposals appear to have tested these panel members' ability to engage in cognitive contextualization. Some panelists interpret philosophy's "autonomy," "isolation," or "lack of common ground" with other disciplines as an indication of its loss of relevance. The geographer, for instance, dismisses the field as "sterile."

I did a degree at Oxford and I did philosophy, politics, and economics [a typical Rhodes Scholar degree]. I decided it was pretty

sterile then, and I think it's become even more awful since . . . It's really still a playing out of the linguistic turn that took hold in Oxford in the 1940s . . . All these guys who taught me had been taught traditional history of philosophy, Kant and Hume, and so on, Descartes. But they dropped all of that because they heard there was this linguistic philosophy without any historical background, so you didn't get any sense of philosophy as an ongoing human preoccupation, what function did it play. Instead it had turned out into a way of solving puzzles . . . These guys had all been in British intelligence in the war, so they all love to sit around thinking up clever things to say, and that's a pretty god-damn sterile way of life.

This panelist did not hide his poor opinion of the field during panel deliberations. The philosopher recalls: "This [geographer] said right out at one point that he's had an encounter with philosophy in Oxford back in the fifties when he was there, that had left him with the impression that it was all just a parlor game . . . he seemed to be questioning the credentials of the whole field on the basis of some anecdotal encounters he's had with people who did it forty years ago, and I thought that was not professional and [not an] appropriate basis for an interdisciplinary panel."²⁵

Other panelists were much more diplomatic in their view of philosophy, but they too saw it as a problematic discipline. An English scholar observes, for instance:

Although there was a huge range of views about many of the proposals, I just remember time and again there would be a very friendly, but pointed and not resolved, argument, either about a philosophy proposal that [the philosopher] really liked and that the rest of us couldn't stand, or about some other proposal that

he didn't like and that other people did like . . . I really didn't appreciate a number of the proposals that the philosopher really admired. I also felt like I couldn't understand why he admired them, and I really appreciated his explaining. I thought [he] was a very articulate, patient explainer, but I just still didn't get it.

Some panel members opposed the philosophy proposals because they considered them boring, unfocused, or simply not as strong as proposals from other fields. One English professor was willing to defer to the philosopher in the evaluation of these proposals, a stance not supported by the other panelists. She explains her attitude this way:

Up to a certain point I was trying to defer to [the philosopher's] ranking. He had some kind of say over which of the philosopher candidates he liked most, which he liked least, why, who was doing what kind of philosophy, why it was important versus something else . . . in my balloting for alternates I tried to kind of go along with that, to sort of support him . . . because I felt that he was the expert and I was sort of out of my league. And I felt that they should have awards, especially if we had high-quality philosophers.

Disciplinary differences in definitions of excellence and, especially, how much weight should be given to "significance" (one of the two most frequently used criteria, as we will see in Chapter 5) also take their toll on philosophy proposals. According to a historian, these proposals are "in their own stratosphere." One philosopher, though, sees as the root problem that originality (the other most popular evaluative criterion) is manifested very differently in philosophy than it is in other fields. The predominant templates that interdisci-

plinary panels use to assess originality focus on the study of new objects. This handicaps philosophy applicants:

We're grappling in much of conventional philosophy with very traditional problems that [have] defined the subject for, you know, thousands of years. It's not that entirely new problems come up that haven't been studied or investigated before . . . I think a certain kind of innovation and certainly originality is important in philosophy, but it's assessed very differently. That was one place where I consistently felt there was a difference between my conception of what the criteria for assessing good philosophy would be and the criteria that were sometimes used in our assessments: it would be held against people if they were doing comparatively traditional projects that might have been worked on in the past.

Finally, philosophy's reputation as a potential "problem case" is not helped by the fact that the discipline is defined by its own practitioners as contentious. Philosophers tend to approach each other's work with skepticism, criticism, and an eye for debate. Disagreement is not viewed as problematic; rather, it largely defines intelligence and is considered a signature characteristic of the culture of the discipline—with often disastrous results for funding. A similar contentiousness characterizes literary scholars.²⁶ But in the case of literary scholars, this rancorous debate occurs in the context of a great interdisciplinary openness, and so is not used to strengthen the disciplinary inward-looking impulse, as is the case in philosophy. The two disciplines have reacted in opposite ways to the decline of their disciplinary audiences—philosophy, with an increasing rigidity of standards, and English, as we shall see, with an approach to standards that is increasingly relativistic and diversified.²⁷

The "Legitimation Crisis" of English Literature

Over the past thirty years, English has distinguished itself from the other disciplines considered here by broadening its mission—to the tasks of producing, teaching, and celebrating literary canons, the profession has added the job of reflecting on the canonization process itself.²⁸ It is perhaps the strong influence of post-structuralism, and of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault in particular, that has made literary scholars particularly aware of standards of excellence as power-laden and anything but platonic ideals. Much of Derrida and Foucault's writings concern the construction of arbitrary hierarchies of meaning.²⁹

Given the commitment to deconstructive analysis that literary scholars evince in their classrooms and in their studies, it should not be surprising that many are ambivalent about the evaluative role of funding panels. The scholars whom I interviewed describe themselves as skeptical of whether "true quality" exists and, if it does, of their ability to recognize it. They tend to understand excellence as a construction resulting from the interaction of panelists, as opposed to an objective quality inherent to the proposal being evaluated. In responding to questions about whether they "believed in excellence" and whether the "cream naturally rises to the top," they emphasize intersubjective processes, such as how panelists collaborate to label specific proposals as being "high quality" based on agreed-on, but certainly "subjective," criteria. One English professor, when asked if she believes in academic excellence, says:

My first impulse is to say no, I think I don't. Let me put it this way: Maybe I believe in academic excellence, but I don't think that's a natural category. I think that we have some kind of consensus around what we like for certain reasons, and then we call them excellence, and then that's what we hold for excellent.

Likewise, she asserts that she does not believe that the cream naturally rises to the top, "because it probably isn't natural." Then, elaborating, she adds:

I could imagine that there is such a thing as a project that would seem to be absolutely excellent according to [some standard], but at the end of the day, that might not be the one that interests me more. Or I could also see something that strikes me as being bold and daring and might not quite have it right yet, but could be doing something that's so important that I would end up at the end of the day supporting that. And I don't think I'm the only person [who] would do that.

Another English professor, when asked whether she believes cream rises to the top, states, "I think if the cream is sort of the one percent, that's probably true. When you're deciding on [fellowships], you're [not] dealing with cream, you're really dealing with two percent [milk]. [*Laughs.*] [You have] a range of proposals and at any given moment that milk could become cream, but you're not exactly sure . . . It's always good to be a little more sort of self-conscious and self-aware and self-questioning when you come into these things. Our agreement about what constitutes cream, that percentage is very small." A third English scholar explains:

One of the things that post-structuralist theory makes us do is say, "You can't just say something is good because it won this or NEH or ACLS," you have to be a little bit more hardheaded than that, you have to look at it for what it is . . . Excellence is constructed, that's true, but is it constructed so that anything I declare to be excellent and set a certain criteria is therefore excellence? Well, no. I'll go back to rigor. Someone who's just clocking time isn't [doing] enough either. [Someone who] has shown some

kind of principle of selection, has been willing to challenge their premises, has been willing to consider data even after you're well along in a study that completely challenges and overgrows the hypothesis you've been making. Those kinds of things I think . . . are things that every field can recognize as good . . . If somebody doesn't know the theoretical and critical literature on their subject, that tells you something right there. It tells you they haven't been doing their homework, [haven't] joined what I would call the intellectual conversations.

Even in the absence of such relativistic views of excellence, the question of how to evaluate literary studies scholarship would remain open. Until the recent past, mastery of close reading, defined as "making very careful observations about how the language works, about how meaning is produced by the interactions of individual words and their allusions to other literary texts," as one English professor explained, played an important role in determining the disciplinary pecking order.³⁰ Three simultaneous developments have rendered these skills less central to the practice of the literary craft, and thus have created a crisis in how literary studies scholarship is to be evaluated. First, the critique of the canonization process has gone hand-in-hand with a critique of privileging the written text, which has fed into a broadening of the disciplinary agenda toward cultural studies, defined as the critical analysis of visual, performative, and literary texts. This shift has transformed the meaning of close reading: deciphering popular culture requires less erudite, properly scholarly (that is, highly legitimate) knowledge than does studying canonized authors. Second, English scholars have widened their interests to include history and anthropology and have become more concerned than they were in the 1950s with locating literary texts within their social and historical contexts. In developing historical skills, English scholars may have indirectly lowered the value of purely literary analytical tools within their broader analytical tool-

kits. Third, social and literary theory has profoundly transformed their understanding of representations, as manifested in variants ranging from Marxist, feminist, psychoanalytical, and structuralist to post-structuralist theories. These changes have led scholars to value "smart" and "interesting" work over the "sound" and "rigorous" studies that were most praised in earlier decades.³¹

One result of these changes is that literature proposals are less competitive than they once were, particularly as compared to those submitted by historians (the latter garner and are perceived as garnering, the lion's share of humanities fellowships). The disciplinary broadening and diversification of criteria of evaluation may have led to a deprofessionalization that puts literary scholars in a vulnerable position when competing on theoretical or historical grounds with scholars whose disciplines "own" such terrains. Cognitive contextualization may be the link between "deprofessionalization" and decreasing awards. To judge a proposal on the basis of the criteria most appropriate to the applicant's discipline requires that panelists have a sense of what such criteria would be. In disciplines like English, where a laundry list of criteria might arguably be applied, panelists are much freer to choose their evaluative criteria as they see fit. So if a literary studies proposal makes much of its reliance on or expansion of work in history, this might prompt a panelist to apply criteria appropriate to the discipline of history rather than of English, and convince others to do so as well (a task made easier by the fact that there is little consensus within the discipline). An English professor recalls:

At one point somebody said, "Gosh, we've giving all the awards to historians." And I remember thinking, "That's not surprising."

There's an almost complete disappearance of literary proposals. English professors don't write literary proposals anymore. And when they do, they don't hold up very well . . . Why do people not write them? . . . [O]ne reason is that literary critics themselves

have turned more and more to doing historical work or social science work and so it's been a matter of a kind of internal self-critique, which is good; it's very healthy. I like it when I and other English professors turn their attention to non-literary materials because I think we're good readers of them . . . [But i]t may be that the historians know how to do this better than English professors do.

A second panelist, also from English, agrees that "the number of fellowships that go to people in language or literature [has] really gone down," and she draws similar connections between this and increasing deprofessionalization:

A lot of work coming out of the English department is less and less literary and more and more engaged in sort of cultural studies or what is called cultural material production. A lot of this material is familiar to people in history and anthropology and may just provoke them, in a sense that, "I know this material fairly well and none of this really computes." Or else "this seems to be over-arguing the importance of material which in fact doesn't really merit this kind of attention," or "the actual analysis being forwarded doesn't really correspond to my sense about what is going on in the particular film or this particular MTV video" . . . To go in that direction, you're moving into that sort of no-man's land or an open field where everybody can be kind of a media expert.

She muses that literary proposals may lose out to ones from history because

There's something about people doing history . . . there is a concrete body of information that you can assess. The interpretation refers to material that is subject to certain kinds of verification. Whereas with literary interpretation, part of it has to do with sort of subtlety, has to do with training, has to do with where you

stand on the theory, how theoretical you want to be, or how formal your orientation is. We can't mount as convincing a case and it's harder to argue not only significance but originality because there's no real, no sort of set terms of agreement.

Regardless of "how theoretical" a literary scholar chooses to be, the discipline now considers mastery of "theory"—defined as a set of conceptual references, not as an activity leading to prediction—an essential skill because it can be used to bridge disciplinary and substantive boundaries. When combined with the lack of "set terms of agreement" regarding merit, emphasizing theory may, as the professor quoted above argues, only exacerbate the discipline's lack of coherence. But to the extent that theory makes it possible to communicate with nonspecialists about topics that cut across areas of expertise, it can positively affect the discipline by enlarging its audience. One English professor reflects on the centrality of theory and his relationship to it in the following terms:

I wish I were a better theorist . . . I tend to love to do textual analysis, I love doing that, and I love doing it in film, and I think people love watching me do that, or reading me do that, but . . . I wish I could be more comfortable playing around with the ideas generated by the reading . . . Theory is something I seem to run away from . . . maybe because it requires me to think in ways that are not intuitive . . . [Theory] allows for a cross-disciplinary conversation. It allows us to put texts in wider conversations with each other, and I think that's important.

The effort to broaden the audience, to conduct "cross-disciplinary conversations," is a logical response to the demographic decline of the field of English literature.³² To win acclaim, however, scholars must perform their theoretical acumen within limits. This in turn requires an additional skill—the ability to balance theorizing with

readability. A different English professor points out, "Literary studies can just get too fancy, too complicated. I really enjoy writing very complicated new critical readings of things, but if people don't understand them, then there's not much point in publishing them." The emphasis on theory is also driven by a "star system" that may be the discipline's response to its loss of status.³³

The panelists I interviewed identify and comment on many of the same aspects of their discipline's internal debates—over standards, the practical meaning and reality of excellence, the merits of theory, the importance of disciplinary boundaries—but they do not necessarily interpret the effects of this lack of consensus in the same way. One, for instance, sees English as nearly paralyzed by its internal divisions and laissez-faire attitude toward evaluative criteria:

English is sort of separate as a discipline because it seems to be divided among itself, but also because I don't think it takes seriously how other [panelists] actually evaluate work in their own field and how important these other criteria are . . . English departments are also probably much more sensitive and responsive to some of the sort of ideological demands that are made upon teachers and on scholars to reflect on how literature does answer to certain kinds of social goals or sort of political ideals. How much should identity politics really enter into the way we teach about literature? Is there a point where that becomes self-insulated or self-segregating? Or is it a mode of empowerment? There often is a kind of reluctance to just have a plain conversation about these issues because it is just so ideologically fraught.

In the context of panelists' evaluation of English proposals, these disciplinary characteristics can be disadvantageous:

There are still fields that have prestige, no matter what the apparent value of the project is. I suspect [that is true of] history, art

history, and certain forms of maybe philosophy. But when it comes to literature, there is absolutely no [a priori prestige] . . . [T]he sense in which projects [in English literature] are dismissed or rejected or questioned tend[s] to be more confident than the way other projects are evaluated . . . [O]ne of the real question marks is: Are these literary projects really calling upon information the way history does, or [on] a body of knowledge or a background that we can really trust to be scholarly in any even sort of commonsensical sense of that word?

Other panelists are more optimistic concerning the evaluation of excellence, disciplinary consensus, and the fate of the field. Pointing to the evaluation of student papers, rather than evaluation of journal submissions or book manuscripts, another English professor explains that English scholars frequently agree. By supplying examples of areas where judgments of quality are routinely made, he adds considerable nuance to how the question of excellence is conceptualized in the field:

I mean, people don't have the same views or the same preferences or the same tendencies or allegiances, but they usually have the same views about what constitutes excellence. So you could, say, grade a student paper with someone who is totally ideologically opposed to you, and you would recognize marshalling of evidence, strength of argument, persuasiveness, an element of flair, originality of argument. You could recognize those whether you happen to like that kind of thing or not. I don't know if this is true in other fields, but there is something slightly schizophrenic here that English professors like to claim they can't do, but they do it every day when they're grading papers.

He believes that "the left wing of literary studies" reproduces the notion that there is no agreement.

I could imagine a situation where I might want to say, "I don't believe in academic excellence." . . . What people usually [respond to] is that there is an absolute ranking: "I know for certain that Shakespeare is better than Updike." And then I think the rest of us are going to say, "Well, I don't believe that" . . . English professors also hate the form of question, "Is so and so a great writer? Is so and so greater than so and so?" I'm more drawn to a kind of worker's ethic, where it's impossible for me to imagine a writer who wouldn't like to write better than they do. I can't imagine a writer thinking, "It's all okay." . . . You might just limit it to a willingness to say some things work and some things don't work. But I can't imagine a world of literature without that.

Among academics who hail from other disciplines, there seems to be a widespread perception that literary scholars are divided, or perhaps even confused, about issues of quality. For instance, a historian draws on his experience sitting on grant panels within his university to describe the situation in English this way:

When you have people from Hispanic languages or English departments, basically they say, "I like this one." You try to find out why, and it's an extremely idiosyncratic thing. They like it because "I like football, and it's about football." People are given a very wide range of acceptable criteria and the criteria for arguing about excellence are much looser. There's not even a lot of experience in granting in departments. They may have experience in judging doctoral dissertations, but in granting they tend to not know how to do it at all . . . There's a range of fields, some fields are in continuous epistemological crisis, others have too much certainty, and the middle range would be the more fruitful. That is, people who are willing to have doubts, but at the same time are not paralyzed, are not arbitrary in their judgment.

A philosopher perceives English as more acutely affected by generational differences than other disciplines: "It seems to me that the differences in criteria don't cut so clearly among disciplines, but also across generations. I mean, what [an older scholar] thinks is good scholarship is not what [this other person] thinks is good or interesting scholarship. So you have at least two generations in addition to disciplines."

At the other end of the spectrum of perception concerning the evaluative skills of literary scholars, one English professor differentiates his standards from those of other disciplines by noting that "people from other disciplines did not read as closely as I did." He goes on to say:

I am coming from English, and in English today anything goes and most of our theories in English are . . . influential in diverse areas. So most of the time I feel like I know where they're coming from and they kind of know where I'm coming from. The discipline of English is extremely fluid, probably the most fluid. [For me the best proposal] is something that is very well written and does a lot of close reading of text and brings out very suggestive implications, conceptual and theoretical. The problem with us in English is that it is extremely difficult to define great writing, but when you see it, you don't miss it.

Historians also believe that "you recognize [excellence] when you see it," but this field is characterized by much greater consensus than is the case for English literature.

History, the Consensual Discipline

Historians are more likely than scholars in other fields to characterize their discipline as presenting a relatively high degree of agree-

ment about what constitutes quality and how to recognize it. The contrast they draw with English literature could not be starker. According to one historian, in his field, "the disciplinary center holds." He explains:

History hasn't been politicized in the way some fields have, in a kind of roughly post-modern sort of approach to history. In the wider field you get a range, but the range is reasonably narrow. There are not so many people who would be writing in the language that would seem empty jargon, [that would be dismissed as a] bunch of junk by people who consider themselves empirical historians. You don't have such a dominant group of people who are very engaged in cultural theory, who would just simply dismiss arbitrarily work that is narrowly empirical. The middle is pretty big, pretty calm, not overtly politicized, and the ends I think are relatively small. The idea that evidence does matter, that giving attention to theory at the same time is a good thing: I think both of those do probably hold.

This peaceful state of affairs is not based on a notion that the field is (or can be) unified around a common theory. Rather, in the opinion of a particularly distinguished historian of early America, what is shared is agreement on what constitutes good historical craftsmanship, a sense of "careful archival work." A European historian concurs:

We are neither English, nor political science . . . We see ourselves as an interpretive, empirically grounded social science. There are a lot of clusters of reasons [for why this is, having to do with] how people are trained, the sense of community that they have while they're being trained. I think that grounding in [the] empirical is something strong that makes historians sort of have more of an

idea of "what's new here?" Research is oriented toward getting results. Theory is useful, but not paramount. Those disciplines that tend to have less agreement are based more on rhetoric, on personalism, that is, "I worked with da, da, da, or this is my theory," and they have no tangible way to judge excellence. I don't think that many of the so-called humanities have that, whereas the social sciences tend to have much more of a stronger sense of what's good and what's not.³⁴

In his book *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*, Georg Iggers argues that if over the past decades history has "not only survived, but thrived," it is in part because it "demands adherence to a logic of scholarly inquiry shared by scholars generally by which the results of historical inquiry can be tested for their validity very much as they are in other disciplines." For Iggers, this empirical focus has prevented the threat posed by post-modernism from "com[ing] to fruition" in history. In place of a legitimation crisis, there has been an "expanded pluralism," accompanied by an expansion in the scope of historical studies.³⁵ Like English, history has benefited from a considerable broadening of its object over the past thirty years, fed by the turn toward microhistoria, women's and gender history, the history of other subaltern groups more generally, "history from below," and expanded coverage of geographic areas.³⁶ History also has had solid undergraduate enrollments for several decades, and unlike English, has suffered comparatively little from an internal split between its teaching and research functions—that is, between teaching history and producing historical studies. It has also had a fairly healthy job market for PhDs. While the number of PhD recipients exceeded the number of job openings throughout most of the 1970s, there was an excess of jobs in 2004–2005 (and earlier, in the 1990s, as well).³⁷ The hiring situation varies greatly across areas, however, with Europeanists facing a more difficult time than scholars working

in traditionally less favored geographical areas. Were the discipline smaller, it might be characterized by more conflict. In several of the competitions I studied, historians were perceived as receiving the lion's share of awards, in part because they apply in such large numbers and are always represented on panels. The disciplinary fault lines might be deeper were I comparing tensions within subfields, such as American history or Chinese history.

The field's degree of consensus has fluctuated over the twentieth century. Along with rising disciplinary autonomy and professionalism, such consensus increased as the postwar college boom spurred a fivefold increase in the number of history professors (between 1940 and 1970).³⁸ During the 1960s, the discipline became polarized politically, with each side claiming objectivity. Influenced by cultural anthropology and hermeneutics, many historians grew increasingly critical of the idea of objectivity, but the discipline as a whole was able to find another basis of consensus in the practice of historical scholarship. Although anti-theoretical proclivities remained, epistemological issues came to be seen as "too hot to handle."³⁹ As a historian of China explains, "With other historians on the panel, as you know, we do tend to agree, but not too much . . . History is very subjective." As in English, divisions occur largely around the use of theory. This same Chinese historian describes tensions within the discipline that reflect the difficulty of accommodating some of the more recent theory-driven trends with the longstanding American tradition of thinking of "history as science," grounded in objectivity.⁴⁰

I would see the polarity as being less between evidence and storytelling than between being evidence driven and being theory driven—that is, where you're engaged in an enterprise which is driven by certain kinds of cultural theory that is outside history and you turn to history with those questions. [For one group] the

eye of the interpreter is given much more power, comparable to an art or literary critic who looks at a painting or feels the power to say, "I can tell you what this means. I can read this text." This is opposed to a much more old-fashioned sort of history that says, "My sources say 'x,' and that's what they say and I think it's clear what they say." These people are totally unaware that they are, in fact, still interpreting. In between, there is both a consciousness of what we're doing and a sense that, nevertheless, there are sources that can speak.

Also pointing out the polarizing role of theory, a young historian of France sees the discipline as currently in "transition":

There's increasingly a kind of fragmentation in the historical field in terms of what is good history, what is bad history, what's the direction that we should be moving in . . . It's over precisely the question of the extent to which theory should be used in the writing of history and to what extent one has lost touch with social and economic reality with the growing [dominance] in the last ten years . . . of cultural history. At the moment we're kind of in a period of transition.

A medieval historian summarizes what she sees as the main bases for division within the field this way:

One divide would be those people who do theory versus those who kind of don't do theory, just do straight archival work. Then there are those people who do a social kind of history versus those who have been informed by what is called a cultural stand and they discuss the construction of everything. Then there are people who seize old scholarship that's political versus that which is not. So those are the three kinds of divides, but those divides

also often intersect with each other . . . I think that [the] sides carry a kind of stereotype of each other. I definitely see myself as somebody who is negotiating, though. I think I'm a strong disciplinarian in that sense. I think history as a discipline has a lot to offer and what it offers is a kind of careful archival work. But at the same time, I'm not naive enough to believe that empiricism is not a theory, so I also want to be more theoretically informed in my archival work.

The decline of social history and the hegemony of cultural history after 1980 have been detailed by intellectual historians, notably in analyses of the emergence of "new cultural historians" (exemplified by the work of the French historians Robert Darnton and Natalie Zemon Davis); the growing influence of Clifford Geertz, Norbert Elias, Pierre Bourdieu, and others; and the effects of post-structuralism.⁴¹ Postmodern theory has been particularly polarizing, but as a South Asian specialist argues, consensus is again gaining strength:

Maybe certain kinds of consensus are evolving. There was a pitched kind of life-and-death battle for a while between people who felt that the post-moderns had taken over everything and were operating in some kind of gangster fashion, to only promote themselves and keep everybody else out, and wanted everybody to wear black, and all that. People's sense of desperation about that [has] passed, and I think people [have] kind of calmed down a bit . . . The people who really did the thinking about post-modernism were very important and they're always present in everything that I read or write or think about. But as for the jargonizing and the credentializing, that's a bit passé.

A very senior scholar sees generational tensions as overlapping substantive points of contention:

[You have] very painful debates, which run on a kind of rough generational fault line . . . : An older generation who did political, economic, intellectual history. A younger generation who works on identity, construction of the memory, who often uses race, class, gender, those group identity questions, as analytical criteria, but many of whom don't. It's most painful in American history, where there's a really sharp fault line. In European [history], my generation has somewhat at least a partial sympathy for those questions that were formed in part by some canonical authors of the new younger generation, so it's not as sharp a break as in American. But there certainly is a lot of generational tension.

Nevertheless, this scholar perceives strong consensus, at least when it comes to the evaluation of graduate students:

When I grade graduate application folders with an American historian with whom I have nothing in common generationally or in training, our grades will hardly vary . . . In history, certainly, we have very good consensus. In history, I think in effect we do have certain shared values about commitment to doing certain kinds of work, [the] ability to write in an effective and interesting way . . . I think English has much less consensus than we have, due to much more serious generational splits—due in the end to the lack of the method, since there are many methods competing. In history, for all the debates, there's a lot of consensus about how it ought to be done.

The intradisciplinary cleavages that these scholars acknowledge do not prevent them or any other of the panelists from history I interviewed from being strongly committed to excellence as a general principle. Some express reservations—for example, one would replace the metaphor of "cream rising to the top" with "a metaphor of

cross, check, discussion, advocacy, persuasion, settling on a consensus, balancing." Still, the affirmative response of a very distinguished American historian to my query about whether he "believes in" excellence is representative of the panelists' position overall:

It's something that it's important to strive towards, recognizing and practicing academic excellence. If we don't have some ideas of what is excellent, it's reduced to a total relative situation where everything is worth as much as anything else, and I don't think that would be a very successful path, either for training or turning out good research . . . There's always going to be some disagreement about academic excellence, but we need to work toward shaping it as best we can and to finding it, even though one knows that it's based on our own symbolic instructions.

Similarly, an African-American woman historian says:

I don't think it's an objective standard that exists . . . but I'm always struck by how much of a consensus there seems to be about what excellence is. I don't know that it's necessarily objective, or consistent even, but I think that there is a sense of the kinds of standards that we can at least begin to agree upon. [*Such as?*] Integrity of the research. Is research based in some kind of rigorous testing, in terms of the way in which it's collected, the ideas behind [it], the methodologies that are used to follow up the conceptualization of a project. Clarity of thought, having very clear ways of articulating what it all means. Having some way of interpreting for others why [it is] important, and what it means, and what relevance it has to a particular field of knowledge or to a larger body of knowledge. Explaining what contributions it's going to make, and making some important contributions along the lines of originality, along the lines of . . . building on . . . the work

of others in very significant ways, perhaps branching out, expanding other important work.

Anthropology's Fragile Boundaries

Anthropology has four branches—archeology, physical anthropology, linguistic anthropology, and social/cultural anthropology—each producing its own type of scholarship. Since the character of the funding competitions I studied made them compatible mainly with social/cultural anthropology, the great majority of proposals (and panelists) were from this branch. Thus the observations here refer to these fields only.

The past thirty years have been characterized by a growing interest in things cultural across the social sciences and the humanities. This is reflected by internal changes not only in the fields of English and history, as we saw, but also in departments such as visual studies and communication, and in sociology.⁴² The influence of cultural anthropology grew considerably during this period, as the work of Clifford Geertz, Mary Douglas, Victor Turner, and others began to feed development in fields outside anthropology. Some anthropologists viewed this proliferation as a threat to the discipline's monopoly over the concept of culture. This concern became more acute as the traditional object of social/cultural anthropology—so-called primitive societies—disappeared and/or was reconceptualized (as post-colonial societies). Worries over disciplinary focus also rose as the field sought new vitality by broadening its reach to include advanced industrial societies and by embracing topics that previously had been the privileged object of other disciplines (for example, immigration, political economy, and science). At the same time, the number of PhDs conferred remained relatively stagnant.⁴³ Accordingly, even recent writings often stress the field's state of crisis,⁴⁴ pointing out that disciplinary consensus has been replaced by perma-

nent disagreement concerning "just about everything." According to Geertz, "One of the advantages of anthropology as a scholarly enterprise is that no one, including its practitioners, quite knows exactly what it is . . . [The result] is a permanent identity crisis."⁴⁵ This atmosphere of crisis seems to have led cultural anthropologists to perceive their discipline's boundaries as fragile and in need of defense against the encroachment of scholars from other fields. One aspect of this disciplinary boundary work has involved separating high-quality research on culture from work judged less sophisticated.⁴⁶ This in turn may have contributed to a tendency to seem inward-looking and self-referential. An anthropologist sees the effects of his field's insular leanings in the proposals he evaluated:

This actually did come up in some of the proposals from anthropology [that we discussed]: they'll often not cite a single thing written by a non-anthropologist, just to give one manifestation of it . . . [A]long with that, there tends to be a certain sanctimoniousness, at least in a certain influential segment of cultural anthropology, that other disciplines, whether sociology or economics, political science, are following naive, positivistic epistemology and that maybe anthropologists are better than that. This also tends to be linked to certain kinds of political commitments as well. You know, we're doing things for the people and these other folks are working for evil governments. So you have graduate students working on a topic where there is a substantial literature in neighboring disciplines, but they'll know nothing about it and sometimes their advisers will never tell them to read it. Why bother—it's not anthropology, therefore it's not worthwhile. I have a grad student, the typical case, who wanted to do a project on illegitimacy among African Americans in Chicago. I mentioned a certain amount of sociological demographic literature on this and he was, first of all, totally surprised to hear it, and sec-

onally, absolutely shocked that nobody else ever encouraged him to go read any of that stuff or talk with any of the people who were working on it. You see quite a lot of [this] in anthropology, unfortunately.

In this context of intense disciplinary boundary work, anthropologists are most clearly preoccupied with epistemological issues concerning the nature of the relationship that develops between the researcher and her object, and with how this relationship influences the researcher's ability to make sense of the object in a non-reductionist manner. Questions of representations, and of how one relates to one's subject, became particularly central and divisive after the 1986 publication of James Clifford and George Marcus's *Writing Culture*, which pushed scholars to acknowledge the literary quality of their writings and the epistemological and moral difficulty of speaking for others. One panelist recalls that "Geertz himself has been very critical of this position. As he puts it, [just] because we can never get the operation room one hundred percent antiseptic, does not mean that we may as well operate in the sewers . . . It's very apt here . . . If all we can really talk about is our own experiences, then that's not very interesting. I'd rather read a good novelist." While concerns with reflexivity are not shared uniformly by the respondents, the topic continues to be the focus of considerable attention within the field.⁴⁷

As we will see in Chapter 4, when epistemological preoccupations lead panelists to adopt discipline-specific criteria of assessment, successful interdisciplinary evaluation is jeopardized. An anthropologist's criticism of a proposal to study changing public opinion in the former Soviet Union provides an example. He considers the applicant, a non-anthropologist who planned to travel to a British university to use survey data collected by other social scientists, alarmingly short on contextual knowledge. This leads the panelist to mobilize a

set of evaluative criteria common in anthropology that may not be applicable to other disciplines:

[These non-anthropologists] didn't speak or read a single language other than English, as far as I know never have been [to Eastern Europe], or if they have been, they probably stayed in some luxury hotel for a couple of days. They could just as easily have proposed to study Guatemala . . . That does get at this issue which tends to divide anthropologists from at least some of this stuff. Finding somewhere an anthropologist reviewing a proposal like this which he will like is never going to be easy . . . I think [the proposal is] more misleading than anything else; I wouldn't want to use funds to support it.

This panelist's comments suggest how readily preferences and evaluative criteria specific to one discipline can be seen as baseline standards for other fields. An anthropologist's summary of the situation also conveys how disciplinary boundary work contributes to the construction of the field's identity:

There's certainly a number of anthropologists, including some very influential ones, [who] look askance at people who work with numbers, and tend to be dismissive . . . My own position on science would be seen as hopeless positivism in some parts of anthropology. For any kind of economist or 99 percent of demographers, I'd be seen as some terrible post-modernist . . . What I thought was most off-putting and most divisive was, at least some members [said that] . . . what they were doing was somehow politically enlightened and what other people were doing was serving the interests of colonialism, imperialism, racism, and everything else, and [they were] linking that to . . . epistemological issues as well as . . . even [linking] the utmost quantitative inter-

disciplinary work to the bad guys . . . What bothers me most is a certain kind of political sanctimoniousness, more even than a kind of anti-scientism.

Anthropology's efforts to protect its boundaries also are manifested in how panelists distinguish the object of anthropology from that of cultural studies. One anthropologist explains: "I heard several times anthropology being described as a discipline with really fuzzy methods, which is a very old misunderstanding of what anthropological methods are, but which I think adequately describes a cultural studies anthropology, which is kind of like journalism." This panelist deplores the blurring of the boundary between anthropology and cultural studies, and he is critical of Clifford and Marcus's argument, "which seems to me has led to a backing away from any belief that it's possible, through immersion or intensive study of a particular context, to get inside of another cultural form. Once you give that up, there's no reason to do intensive, long-term research." These views, which prompted "disagreements" with other panel members, reflect this anthropologist's understanding of his field's most essential boundaries. He says:

Ultimately, I am kind of a traditionalist in that I believe that anthropology as a discipline has really only one feature that distinguishes it from what, say, journalists do or what anyone might do, and that is sort of the critical value of face-to-face field work or gaining people's trust; of getting at the social world through actual personal interaction. So whenever I see an anthropological project that involves more than two locales, or three maybe, it seems to me impossible that that person will be able to do that.

Several panelists involved in cultural studies rejected this "traditionalist" position as being at odds with the discipline's recent em-

brace of multi-sited research.⁴⁸ A sociologist portrays this anthropologist—who during deliberations had described work at multiple sites as “lite anthropology” and criticized “people who don’t have twelve months to sit in one village or in one family”—as a person who “seemed to be a gatekeeper in this kind of very reactionary way, like he wanted to return anthropology to pre-1985. Not that I’m so into people just doing auto-ethnography . . . but I think that anthropology can go forward.” These remarks allude to an ongoing debate over a larger and more fundamental issue for anthropology, that is, whether the technique of combining methods (“triangulating”) is as desirable a methodological approach as traditional field work. This is a heavily loaded question, because extended ethnographic fieldwork is one of the most central ways in which anthropology distinguishes itself from qualitative sociology.

Debates within anthropology—over methodological issues or around questions of reflexivity—are pervasive and include the four departments that historically have been most centrally involved in graduate training (those at Columbia University, the University of Chicago, the University of California at Berkeley, and the University of Michigan), as well as other departments that some now see as being on the rise (those at Princeton and New York University in particular). Since these debates influence how anthropologists and anthropologists-in-training handle theory and frame their work, they also affect research proposals, and how academics from other disciplines react to those proposals. One historian notes:

A lot of Columbia anthropology, and we tend to get a lot [of proposals from them], it has a lot of jargon in it . . . In a lot of cases, the historical methodology side is pretty weak. I don’t want to sort of be in a position of always giving low grades to Columbia anthropology, so I have given this [one] actually a higher grade than I would’ve [otherwise]. But in the course of the debate, other

people said that the [proposal] didn’t actually live up to what the person said he/she was going to do.

Anthropologists’ relationship to theory may make their proposals particularly challenging for panelists. For instance, a political scientist comments:

I ended up getting a lot of the proposals in anthropology, but a lot of them I thought were pretty bad when it comes to sort of using clear language and being jargon laden. I mean I had to work harder . . . to try and figure out what the significance was. And sometimes, I must say, it worked to their advantage. I remember one proposal, it was on the measurement of waste, on refuse, okay? I think if you look at my score, I gave it a two. I remember reading this proposal and going, this is either a, no pun intended, but a bunch of shit, or it’s just a waste, no pun intended again, or it’s really brilliant. And it seemed to be very self-referential in terms of the language that he was using to craft the proposal. But I thought this may be one of these ones where I just don’t get it. I’m worried I’m going to be overly prejudicial, so I’m going to give it a two . . . The other anthropologist gave it a five, and they looked at me and they went, “What did you see in this?” And I went, “I don’t know!” I wanted to bend over backwards [to avoid prejudice]. They said, “Well, don’t do that again.”

This respondent’s remarks point to the important methodological differences that exist between his field and anthropology. An anthropologist, acknowledging that he felt distant from the political scientists on his panel, confirms those differences: “In many ways, yes, it was one of the major divides in the room among panel members. It was the political scientists who had the nasty things to say about anthropological methods.”

In anthropology, contested notions of excellence reflect the influence of post-structuralism, which emerges particularly in debates over whether excellence resides in the object being evaluated or is located in the eye of the beholder. A cultural anthropologist who teaches at a top university articulates the field's multilayered conception of excellence:

There [are] places where everybody's in agreement, where this is excellence that's recognizable no matter what your field is. And then there are cases where excellence is something that's negotiated within the group of evaluators, who are subjective. But then there's something else, too, which is what you might want to think of as inter-subjectivity between the individual reviewer and the writer, so it's more of an author-reader relationship in that kind of collaborative recognition . . . I don't want to say that there are objective standards of quality, but there are certainly conventions of excellence that a good proposal pretty much, no matter what the field, can engage with.

Asked if she believes in academic excellence, she answers, "I suppose I'd have to say that philosophically and intellectually, probably not, but in some sort of visceral way, probably so . . . I was just reading political philosophy of post-structuralist sorts, and so I know that you can't really, that excellence is constructed. And yet, you know, constructed or not, it's still, it's the discipline that we're all kind of disciplined in. So it operates as if it were something real." Yet for other anthropologists, the consensus that emerges from the independent ranking that panelists produce prior to the group meeting confirms that quality is intrinsic to the proposal. As one interviewee says:

A matrix was prepared which rated [proposals] by total score [i.e., the sum of the scores given by each panelist]. It was notable that

there was . . . considerable consistency, homogeneity of the scores. So in [the] meeting, in terms of the cream rising to the top, there was a general sense in which, you know, here are these that [have] practically perfect scores, so we don't really need to do much discussion of these.

As we will see, the more relativistic approach—the concept of excellence as constructed—is not central in political science or in economics. In these disciplines, very different evaluative cultures prevail.

Political Science: Divisive Rational Choice

If political science is in better health than anthropology from a demographic standpoint (see Figure 3.1), like anthropology, it has become divided over the past thirty years, largely as a consequence of the ascent of rational choice theory and the concomitant hegemony of formal theory and methodology.⁴⁹ In somewhat simplified terms, the rational choice paradigm posits utility maximization as the sole and universal motivation for human action and claims that all social structures and processes can be explained by aggregating individual choices. It is particularly concerned with group decision making and the handling of institutional constraints. Disciplinary commentators have discussed at length the divisive effects of the rise of the rational choice model, noting, for example, how it has amplified other divisions, such as that between researchers who use quantitative versus qualitative methods.⁵⁰ An important counterhegemonic response, dubbed the "Perestroika Movement," emerged publicly within the American Political Science Association (APSA) in 2001.⁵¹ This pressure group (whose email list in 2003 included roughly 5 percent of the APSA membership) primarily sought three changes: a balance between quantitative and qualitative research in the *American Political Science Review*, the discipline's most prestigious journal; a more democratic process for selecting the APSA executive board (APSA

leaders are not chosen through competitive elections); and more methodological pluralism, including greater disciplinary support for qualitative work, problem-driven (as opposed to method-driven) approaches, and area expertise in contrast to the production of generalizable theories.⁵²

Ian Shapiro, Rogers Smith, and Tarek Masoud's analysis of the field identifies similar points of tension within political science: they single out the problem- versus method-driven research divide, the debate around rational choice, and methodological pluralism.⁵³ One panelist explains how the low degree of consensus affects the work of panels: "The lack of consensus relates to what questions are important. Some people will just look at the method and ask if it's been well done, and others of us will, I think, look at the *importance* of the questions and *then* the method and say [whether] this has been well done" (my emphasis). This panelist, who is a political scientist, notes that math and formalization have come to define "good methods": "If someone has a really good question—Adam Przeworski is an example of this—. . . and is using different methods and formalizing, it's fine with me if they're formalizing something that's important. But I think a lot of people don't react that way." Disparagingly, she concludes, "I think academics are a surly bunch. I think we're paid to argue. By surly I mean, you know, people are always yapping away about . . . questions of method, gossiping about who's good and who's bad."

The divisions within political science have worked to the advantage of proponents of rational choice theory. Many contemporary political scientists point to the epistemological homogeneity of economics as a model of "progress." By appealing to the argument that such intellectual consensus signals disciplinary evolution and status, backers of rational choice theory have been able to extend their paradigm's sway over the field.⁵⁴ Indeed, an economist, happily noting an increasing resemblance between his field and political science, as-

serts, "That's the field where the cancer of economics has spread most. So our field is kind of penetrating that field and perceptions in that field are to some extent shaped a little like economics in ways that [are] not true for literature, anthropology, sociology." Of the political scientists on his panel, he says, "I could see the cogs going around in their heads in ways that were similar to mine a lot of the time." During interviews, political scientists explicitly mentioned the influence of rational choice on their field and on the evaluations. In the respondents' view, the hegemony of the rational choice approach has translated into a redefinition of standards of excellence for everyone in political science, thus influencing how scholars define their goals and intellectual trajectory. For example, while one panelist states that now "it all comes down to how quantitatively sophisticated you are," a top comparativist explains that he would like to produce more quantitatively sophisticated work, and in particular, simulation, because this is where the action is now in his field. "I think that there are possibilities for tremendous creative breakthroughs. It's just a hunch that I have." Even political scientists who have not been fully converted by this revolution may still use its tools sporadically; and some take an eclectic approach, using rational choice models along with other paradigms and their accompanying methodologies. Others note that those who reject the rational choice paradigm are disadvantaged when applying for funds from some organizations. Many within the field believe that certain funding sources, such as the political science program at the National Science Foundation, are particularly welcoming toward rational choice proposals, while others, such as the SSRC's International Dissertation Field Research Competition that I studied, are more open to qualitative research. In short, different funders are perceived as using different standards and emphases for awarding grants.

The emphasis on rational choice theory in political science also

raises problems for academics outside of political science. Among evaluators I interviewed, this was particularly the case for anthropologists. One offers this summary of a widely shared perspective: "Anthropologists think that [rational choice] is a totally misbegotten theory of human behavior, you know, actions are not produced by any kind of simple rational calculation. And even if they were, the variables involved, namely defining what the goals are in the model, [are] entirely beyond the model itself. So for all these reasons, I tend to take a very dim view of it."

Clearly, the ascent of the rational choice paradigm is important in its own right, but it is also tied to much broader questions within the discipline concerning the meaning of science. In their influential book *Designing Social Inquiry*, published in 1994, Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba invited qualitative researchers to produce the same kind of descriptive or causal inferences (or predictions about the nonobservable) as can be produced by quantitative research.⁵⁵ The book generated a strong response among qualitative researchers concerned with demonstrating their commitment to science through their methodological rigor.⁵⁶ *Designing Social Inquiry* has played an emblematic role for political science comparable to that which Clifford and Marcus's *Writing Culture* played for anthropology. As one political economist puts it: "People get kind of obsessed with writing in registers or genres that look more like science, even though these guys are really interpretivists. There's a lot of concern with things like case selection . . . to demonstrate that, in fact, qualitative research methods are really as rigorous as quantitative ones."⁵⁷ This panelist believes that the main debate in his field concerns whether a "person [is] contributing to a generalizable theory of politics, or nomothetic laws of politics, or universal theory, to the extent that someone is arguing this person has to be supported because he or she is making a theoretical contribution." Yet others

believe that the conflict around rational choice theory is receding, or that it has been exaggerated.

Despite the divisiveness that characterizes the discipline, most political scientists I interviewed say they believe in scientific progress ("We stand on each other's shoulders. It is a collective enterprise"). They also tend to agree that quality resides in the proposals themselves, as opposed to resulting from the interpretation of the judges. One political scientist defines excellence in terms of successfully meeting disciplinary standards. He states: "I believe that there are scientific norms that are relatively well understood, that are pretty explicit. My view on this would be Lakatosian . . . There are certain norms that one can battle about. The battles are within, I think, pretty narrow parameters." This scholar believes that relativism applies to some kinds of knowledge and not others. For him, there are poles of relativism and certainty, and interpretations of the world are important when it comes to ethical matters. But, "I don't think it works well if we're looking, say, at thermodynamics or mathematics . . . the mathematics we have is not relative, you know, there are proofs there." Another political scientist dismisses as "silly" the view that claims to truth are just competing narratives. Of those who adopt such views, he says, "I think they believe in academic excellence, but defined differently. It's more defined in terms of intellectual virtuosity and the capacity to find hidden meanings in arguments rather than original contributions to knowledge. I think they have some very clear ideas of academic excellence, they're just different." When asked if she believes in academic excellence, another political scientist—a Europeanist teaching at a large Midwestern university—responds, "I mean, it's not like God or something, but I know when I'm reading something excellent and when I'm not. I don't know that there's consensus about it. I mean either someone has convinced me of something or they haven't. Either they have

the evidence or they don't. If they have the evidence, then it's nicely done."

Economics: Unified by Mathematical Formalism

Economics is rivaled only by history in its level of disciplinary consensus. Unlike history, however, where the basis for unity is a shared sense of craftsmanship in research, economists' cohesion is grounded in a cognitive unification that was largely achieved by the 1960s, as mathematical economics triumphed over other approaches (institutionalist, Marxian, and anti-mathematical institutionalist, for instance).⁵⁸ This ascendance of mathematical economics has translated into a homogenization of the core courses in every major institution, which has further solidified its position. Of course, there is substantial diversity across fields. According to Harvard economist Elhanan Helpman, "The empirical methodology dominating labor economics is quite different from the empirical methodology dominant in industrial organization. Behavioral economics plays a much bigger role in finance than in international trade, and the degree of rigor varies across fields. These types of division are accepted, although with a grudge by some scholars."⁵⁹

Disciplinary agreement is echoed at the international level, where the use of mathematical formalism has promoted an intellectual consolidation of the field around economics as practiced in the United States.⁶⁰ It is notable that the high degree of professional consensus among economists has been accompanied by a robust production of PhDs. Although there was a slight decline from 1975 to 1985, the number of PhDs conferred in economics has grown steadily and consistently over the past twenty years—to over one thousand such degrees in 2005. Relative to the number of doctorates awarded in all disciplines, degrees conferred in economics appear to have remained fairly constant. English, history, and political science, by contrast, all

have seen their proportional representation decline by a percentage point or more over the past thirty or so years, largely due to the increased number of science and engineering PhDs.⁶¹

Perhaps owing to their discipline's epistemological cohesiveness, economists seem much less concerned with (or even aware of) the constructed nature of excellence. Panelists perceive economists as agreeing more readily on the quality of proposals than is typical of academics from the humanities and the more humanistic social sciences. They describe economists as behaving as if it were possible to draw a clear line between proposals. As a historian puts it, they all agree that "this is an A, this is an A—." Another, describing history as "subjective," differentiates it from economics, where "It's up or down." An economist endorses these views, observing, "I think in economics we're fortunate to have a fairly unified view of what is or is not good research." A program officer traces this approach to evaluation to the more homogeneous culture of the discipline: "I just find that the training is sort of set up by being a purely internalist discourse within the discipline. There's such a strong sort of epistemological hegemony within the discipline."

Economists' standards of evaluation, too, strike panelists as differing from those used in other disciplines. Historians acknowledge competing standards and often ask, as the feminist historian Joan Scott has, "whose standards determine the standards of the discipline?"⁶² Economists, in contrast, are seen as considering evaluation to be a fairly straightforward matter of separating winners from losers. Compared to most other panel members, they seem much less concerned with traditional markers of scholarship—contextual knowledge, linguistic competence, and so on. On one panel, for instance, the economist did not understand why an applicant who planned to study three countries, including Greece, would not be funded because she lacked familiarity with the Greek language. He viewed this objection as a red herring. For their part, noneconomists

are often very critical of the assumptions that applicants from economics make in their proposals. An anthropologist comments, "They [applicants from economics] were viewed as living in their own world, defined by a theoretical worldview and both being unwilling to explain it and not interested in thinking about anything different." Similarly, a sociologist notes an economist's critical attitudes toward more interpretive proposals: "He was coming out of a sort of pretty positivist organization that most of the rest of the committee didn't care for. So he tended to be kind of critical of all the history proposals. But the rest of the folks, I thought, were quite open and were willing to change their minds."

In keeping with their discipline's positivist tradition, the economists I interviewed seem to believe that excellence resides in the objects being evaluated—in the proposal and the project themselves—as opposed to resulting from the negotiated interdisciplinary agreement reached by panelists. The sense economists have of a clear line that separates the best from the rest is associated, as well, with a more objectivist view of the value of knowledge. At the close of an interview, one economist reaffirms his belief in academic excellence by saying, "I certainly believe there are ideas that are valuable and discovering them is a mark of excellence in all kinds of ways . . . I certainly think there's something out there to look for, and people who are finding it. I guess that's the definition of excellence. I think we recognize now certain major ideas developed in the past that really changed our view of the world."

Conclusion

American higher education brings together disciplines that are remarkably different in their evaluative cultures, intellectual traditions, and professional languages. Disciplinary norms are stronger in some fields than in others, because American academia is also multidimensional, traversed by networks and literatures that are not always

bounded by disciplines. The current state of American political science is a case in point. And although hiring and promotion decisions are made within disciplinary cultures, such is not the case for funding decisions made by multidisciplinary panels, which have to create shared evaluations across epistemological and other divides. This context primes academics to make explicit their shared, taken-for-granted perspectives as well as their differences—which may range, at the most general level, from the split between humanists and social scientists regarding the proper place of subjectivity in the production of knowledge, to divisions over theory, method, and standards of evaluation within and across individual disciplines. Panelists' understandings of the challenges facing their disciplines and their expectations regarding what is valued in other fields affect the type of arguments they make for or against proposals. That expectations for ethnographic research are higher for anthropologists than for political scientists illustrates this point.

It seems from my study that those panelists most able to form a consensus about definitions of excellence come from the fields of history and economics. In history, broad consensus is based on a shared definition of good craftsmanship in the practice of empirical research; in economics, consensus results from cognitive consolidation around mathematical tools. While economists are described as believing that they can clearly distinguish among high-quality proposals, and appear to downplay the role of intersubjectivity in the identification of excellence (perhaps because of the role of formalization), historians acknowledge the existence of gray areas and the importance of negotiation and debate in determining excellence. Having been influenced by post-structuralism, historians, like their colleagues in English literature, are more likely than economists to ask "whose criteria get universalized as disciplinary criteria." As is also true of English, history is cleaved around the role of theory and

politics as criteria of evaluation. In contrast, economics is viewed as being influenced very little by politics. Thus although both disciplines are fairly consensual, history is more divided internally than economics. This can be explained in part by the fact that history is more defined by national spatial borders than is economics, which is more cognitively unified globally. Moreover, economists may be more self-satisfied with their consensual state than are historians—a clear indicator of disciplinary maturity according to some.⁶³ The alternative view, perhaps more in line with that of historians, would be to define the ability to tolerate ideological and methodological pluralism as a signal that the field has matured.

Of the six fields considered, English faces the most acute disciplinary crisis, both demographically and intellectually. Several panelists hailing from this discipline question the very concept of academic excellence. Panelists note the low consensus on what defines excellence (notably on what defines originality and significance), as well as the prevalence of disciplinary skepticism and relativism. There is a proliferation of criteria for assessing excellence, including through theories and authors that help bridge substantive topics. Panelists express concern over deprofessionalization and the decline of real disciplinary expertise at a time when close reading is losing its disciplinary centrality, when cultural studies is becoming more prominent, and when English scholars are increasingly borrowing their topics and methods from historians and culture experts. In this context, excellence is often viewed as residing in the eye of the beholder (or in interpretive communities, such as those described by Stanley Fish), rather than being an intrinsic property of the object being evaluated.⁶⁴ The increasingly interdisciplinary nature of English itself certainly may prepare literary scholars to accept the methods used in proposals emanating from a subset of cognate fields. The same holds for history.

Threatened by the popularity of cultural analysis in other fields,

anthropology is becoming more inward-looking and engaged in disciplinary boundary work in an effort to distinguish what is worthy cultural analysis from what is not making the cut. In this context, epistemological positions, politics, and method are particularly important. As in English and history, theory can play a divisive role in limiting disciplinary consensus. Moreover, like English, anthropology is a self-reflexive discipline where there is a greater awareness of the constructed character of excellence.

Political science aspires to the level of consensus found in economics, but the new hegemony of rational choice theory has divided the discipline against itself, as have internal conflicts regarding the privileging of quantitative over qualitative research. In contrast, philosophy is unambiguously inward-looking. Many philosophers believe that only they are qualified to evaluate research emanating from their field, in part because significance and originality have to be measured using distinct, traditional discipline-specific matrices. The discipline is perceived by other panelists as too autonomous and increasingly insignificant and obsolete, in part because of its seemingly elitist stance. Thus some program officers and a number of panelists define philosophy as a problem discipline.

Given this diversity in disciplinary evaluative cultures and the associated potential for conflict, how do panelists succeed in reaching consensus and making awards? As we learned in Chapter 2, the technology of peer review panels brings scholars into the same room and creates a context that constrains and channels differences. The rules and exigencies of reviewing, and the constraints of making funding decisions within a delimited time frame, push panelists to reach agreement. So too does the promotion of a culture of pluralism by program officers. Although academics are contrarians, this culture helps counterbalance disciplinary differences by fostering a shared commitment to academic excellence. As I will show in Chapter 4, members of multidisciplinary peer review panels abide by a set of

customary rules. Chief among these is the rule of cognitive contextualization, which requires that panelists use the criteria of evaluation most appropriate to the field or discipline of the proposal under review. In other words, they recognize that different standards should be applied to different disciplines. Panelists learn as well the importance of a willingness to listen and to defer to one another's expertise. As a geographer points out, despite the difficulties, the act of evaluating interdisciplinary work can bring its own pleasure and unique rewards:

Even though it's a lot of work to read all these proposals, what was wonderful was to hear experts in fields acknowledge people for their scholarship . . . it was wonderful to hear the perspective from a person in the field on that topic and on that proposal. It was a process for me, it was like sitting in a lecture in a field that's not your own . . . [seeing] the imagination and the scope of that field revealed through a practitioner.

How evaluators move from a hypothesized (Bourdieuian) world where, to paraphrase Hobbes, academic men are wolves to each other, to one where deliberations are described by participants in a language of pleasure, consideration, and deference is the topic we turn to next. As we will see, the black box of grant peer review is characterized by collegueship, but it is also a multidimensional space in which muscles are flexed and where networks compete in the forging of shared definitions of excellence.

6/Considering Interdisciplinarity and Diversity

We are clearly without any kind of mystery about it: criteria other than excellence are being used.

Political scientist

Although the criteria of interdisciplinarity and diversity are used to distinguish one proposal from another, they do not speak to quality per se. Instead, they concern characteristics of proposals and applicants that may push a very good but not perfect project or candidate over the proverbial bar. As such, diversity in particular can act as an additive, rather than as an alternative, standard of evaluation.

The discussion focuses first on the distinct challenges raised by the evaluation of interdisciplinary proposals and explores how panelists define "good interdisciplinarity" given the general lack of consensus in this area. That the necessary types of expertise are rarely combined within a single person partly accounts for the difficulties of evaluating interdisciplinary research. Falling back on disciplinary standards is the path of least resistance.

We will see that in the world of funding panels, as in the world of American higher education, diversity takes many forms and comes in many hues. Yet while public debates center mainly on the place of racial and gender diversity in higher education, panelists assign the most weight to institutional and disciplinary diversity. Various types of diversity are valued as an intrinsic good that contributes to the overall quality of the research environment. Concerns for representation and efficacy (being truthful to the organizational mission) are factored into arguments in favor of diversity, but diversity is also valued as a component of excellence and as a means of redressing past injustices, leveling the playing field, and shaping the academic pipeline.

The five competitions under consideration are multidisciplinary in the sense that they aim to fund proposals emanating from a range of disciplines and their panel members are drawn from various disciplines (see Chapter 2). But these competitions all fund, in varying proportions, both disciplinary and interdisciplinary proposals. Only three of the sponsors explicitly encourage interdisciplinary scholarship.¹ As for diversity, while some competitions, such as that of the American Council for Learned Societies, specify that "minorities and other groups are encouraged to apply," others do not mention diversity criteria in their guidelines to panelists or applicants. Such considerations have become part of the taken-for-granted standards used for evaluation across a range of settings in American higher education; and most of the funding organizations I studied promote diversity as part of their broader organizational mandate. Not surprisingly, then, when reporting arguments made in favor and against proposals, the interviewees routinely refer to the influence of various kinds of diversity.

Critics of affirmative action believe that factoring in diversity poses challenges related to fairness. As explained by the political theorist Michael Walzer in his classic *Spheres of Justice*, justice is not one idea but several, because there is no single criterion by which justice

should be assessed.² Principles of justice such as merit, need, and distributive fairness are not all of the same order and they often clash with one another. The French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, however, suggest that "compromise" can often be reached between competing principles of legitimation.³ How panelists balance excellence and diversity is a case in point, as we will see.

Tensions between excellence and diversity, and meritocracy and democracy, remain at the center of debates about peer review. The spatial dispersion of the American higher education system over a very large territory, its institutional diversity (covering public and private universities, as well as research universities, small liberal arts colleges, and community colleges), and the sociodemographic diversity of administrators, faculty, and students all keep these tensions alive. Against such a diverse landscape, winners should be chosen from a variety of groups and regions, and panelists should be somewhat representative of the broader population. For instance, winners cannot all come from a few select institutions in the Northeast—this would undermine the legitimacy of peer review as a meritocratic and democratic system. Such a result would likely be viewed as an organizational failure and/or as the outcome of elitism (opportunity hoarding) or poor procedures. The democratic impulse attenuates the steep institutional hierarchies that characterize American higher education, but it does not impede an unconditional celebration of excellence and meritocracy, which is viewed elsewhere as the expression of a certain social Darwinism.⁴

Rewards and Challenges of Interdisciplinary Evaluation

Interdisciplinarity has many manifestations, including the degree to which disciplinary boundaries are permeable and the extent to which disciplines are conceptually integrated.⁵ More specifically, interdisciplinarity typically involves (1) developing conceptual links

by using a perspective in one discipline to modify a perspective in another discipline, (2) using research techniques developed in one discipline to elaborate a theoretical model in another, (3) developing a new theoretical framework that may reconceptualize research in two or more separate domains as it attempts to integrate them, and (4) modifying a theoretical framework characteristic of one domain and then applying it to another.⁶

Interdisciplinarity has been a priority in the funding world for several years. It is favored by the leaders in federal funding (the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation), by universities eager to stake out new territory that will raise their profile, and by a number of private foundations.⁷ Thus the funding competitions I studied are not exceptional in promoting interdisciplinarity. Program officers take organizational guidelines seriously; in putting together funding panels, they factor in potential members' interdisciplinary orientation. Consequently, during interviews, many panelists were vocal in their appreciation for interdisciplinary research. An English professor's comments capture this enthusiasm: "The more subjects you canvas, the more likely you are to approach your topic fairly . . . Putting things together that are not usually put together is a good thing to do, an [innovation] that might produce useful knowledge." In addition to its role in producing "useful knowledge," interdisciplinarity is valued because it improves one's "ability to speak to different sets of people," thus broadening a project's intellectual reach. Yet as we will see, panelists also acknowledge that "true" or "good" interdisciplinarity is often elusive.

Doing It Well

After briefly establishing his identity as an interdisciplinary scholar ("I read things in anthropology, sociology, probably less in political science and literature"), a historian notes that interdisciplinarity "is a

challenging thing to do effectively,” and concedes that “there are valid criticisms about the way historians have sometimes adopted tools and ideas from other fields.” Indeed, some critics dismiss interdisciplinary research as a fad, and as a form of scholarship that is not easily amenable to evaluation.⁸ Others have argued that the very notion of “peer review” cannot be validly applied to interdisciplinary research.⁹ It is in this context that social scientists have begun thinking systematically about the challenges of evaluating interdisciplinarity—an underexplored topic.¹⁰ They have identified some criteria specific to the assessment of interdisciplinarity (for example, consistency with previous research, balance between interdisciplinary perspectives, and potential effectiveness).¹¹ There is also some agreement on the potential pitfalls of interdisciplinary scholarship. The panelists speak to both aspects, describing some of the positive as well as negative attributes of interdisciplinary work (and those who undertake it).

The best interdisciplinary proposals successfully combine breadth, parsimony, and soundness. Here is how a geographer goes about identifying applicants who meet these stringent standards:

To be an artful and talented researcher, [what] one has to do is actually master several fields . . . You have to be able to talk the talk of several disciplines, but to be able to see where cutting edges are and take certain gambles in terms of advancing an idea . . . I take a risk on [proposals that have] interesting ideas, even if they’re bumping into different fields. I look very carefully at the training [of the applicant], who they’re working with, the scholarship of the person they have worked with, to assess whether I think this person is actually capable of raising some big questions.

A historian focuses on the dialogic character of successful interdisciplinary proposals.¹² “To hit a basic threshold of significance,” he explains, the proposal must speak to different disciplines simulta-

neously: “If you can reach people outside your field, you’re interdisciplinary . . . A proposal that is able to speak across disciplinary idioms to a majority of people on the panel is going to be a suitable proposal.” The best interdisciplinary proposals are also integrative, that is, they bring together ideas and approaches from different disciplines.¹³ Thus, unsurprisingly, among the pitfalls and drawbacks that respondents identify, a primary concern is overreaching or over-ambitiousness. As an English professor points out, “Projects that have a lot of ambition to reach beyond the person’s initial field; they’re risky. The person might not be able to do what they want to do. Over-ambitiousness was what was both attractive and fatal for some of the projects.” A historian couples superficiality with overreach, maintaining that “if you are interdisciplinary, the burden is upon you, the candidate, to be aware of that discipline and not do shoddy work.” This same panelist offers the following telling comparison of two applicants from literary studies, each of whom proposed to use a historical approach:

She did what he failed to do. She’s not an historian, but she didn’t get the history wrong, and she grounded [the proposal] correctly in context. And I could see how the work would contribute to this sort of interdisciplinary approach where she’s trying to look at this literature historically within that context. The few literature proposals that I’ve gotten have just been very bad for the very reasons that I’m describing—they’re all over the map. They have no real grounding in context. They bandy theory that isn’t well integrated. I . . . ranked them quite harshly.

Flashiness, too, is often associated with overreach. Another historian, contrasting flashy and real interdisciplinarity, says of flashiness:

There is a . . . way of doing things in which you use your knowledge of the other things, the things outside your discipline, more

as a rhetorical strategy than as something in which you really steep yourself in. It's always a danger in interdisciplinary work.

An English professor offers a similar criticism when she describes as "fast and loose" an interdisciplinary project concerning capitalism and the economic and political power of native Americans: "A fast and loose project would be throwing around some interdisciplinary vocabulary . . . It would pull in Gayatri Spivak and Benedict Anderson and throw them into some kind [of] theoretical soup, maybe just be tagging phrases and not really applying their theories in any kind of deep way." Although many have clear ideas about what makes for bad interdisciplinary research, the greatest difficulties it poses concern how to assess it fairly and with consensus.

Evaluating It Well

The standards used to evaluate interdisciplinary research are not a simple combination of the standards of single disciplines. They are a hybrid, and an emergent hybrid at that—one that has developed through practice and deliberation. Because the criteria have these emergent qualities, some panelists believe that interdisciplinary panels are more open-minded than regular, single-discipline panels, that there is a greater willingness to "listen to other people's criteria and sort of question your own . . . to change their minds or to reconsider." Others believe that such panels are more conservative than their disciplinary counterparts.¹⁴ This conservative bias may be influenced by the members' age; panelists tend to be older than the average applicants to most competitions. Older scholars have been less socialized to appreciate interdisciplinary work. Mentioning a controversial tenure case at her elite institution, an English scholar remarks that "especially older colleagues are very unwilling even to approach judging [this scholar's] work. They just want to say, 'We

shouldn't have this kind of work because we can't judge it. We can't tell whether it's good or bad.' And that seems to me a terrible reason to fire someone." As in tenure decisions, the challenge of fairly evaluating interdisciplinary proposals is not helped by the fact that typically no panelist has mastered all the knowledge needed to assess competently all of their aspects.¹⁵ Sometimes no consensus emerges about whose disciplinary sovereignty should be deferred to, which means that evaluating interdisciplinary research can be an especially risky venture.

Interdisciplinarity often brings about a broadening and multiplication of evaluation criteria, which makes both individual judgment and group agreement much more difficult. The same English professor quoted earlier notes that in her field, the traditional criteria used with regard to close reading is whether the author can perform a "subtle, accurate reading" of a sonnet, for instance. In the case of interdisciplinary work, the criteria become whether the argument is "plausible, persuasive, how is evidence used." And although the use of evidence is a constant, it is often difficult or impossible for panelists to know whether an applicant is proposing to use the most appropriate evidence available. Only those extremely familiar with the specific case are in a position to evaluate this aspect—and even across academia in general, the number of such competent judges is likely to be very small. This same English professor, whose scholarship is well known and highly regarded, illustrates the dilemma by describing her own experience undertaking an interdisciplinary research project:

You take your theoretical frame from some existing source. If you're writing about sexuality, you would follow the rules laid down by Foucault, so that it would be possible to judge whether someone was pursuing a Foucaultian reading in a proper way. [However], I felt that I certainly knew more about these journalis-

tic accounts [I was studying] than anybody else did, and that meant that nobody really ever could say that I was wrong, and that made me worried . . . They would inevitably be impressed by the fancy footwork that I performed with these sources, but it would be difficult for someone to say that I had read them wrong.

As this quote suggests, the lack of canonized agreement about how to evaluate interdisciplinarity gives researchers more leeway concerning how to go about their work, but it also creates greater uncertainty about how to establish the resulting project's quality. A historian emphasizes the importance of using "other fields' toolkits" in a disciplined way. This approach he contrasts with "the kind of interdisciplinarity that Stanley Fish once complained about, which is basically the person who makes up his own standards and therefore is bound by no one. I am interested in consciously trying to sort of broker useful relations between disciplinary toolkits."

Combining traditional standards of disciplinary excellence with interdisciplinarity presents a potential for double jeopardy. This is because expert and generalist criteria (what one respondent defines as "virtuosity and significance") have to be met at the same time. Because interdisciplinary research is a hybrid form, the usual criteria of evaluation—originality and significance, for instance—may end up being weighted differently. A historian of China says it is important to have

the endorsement of specialists who feel that . . . this [is] going to satisfy needs in your particular discipline. I mean only after we got a "yes" to that would I want to go on. Now we apply the second tier of criteria, which is, "Is it going to do anything for anybody else?" The first thing in the sequence . . . certifies people as competent in their, as it were, local expertises. But to me, that's not the ultimate criteria. The ultimate criterion is, is it going to do anything for the rest of us.

Not surprisingly, given the emergent quality of the standards of evaluation for interdisciplinary genres, panelists readily fall back on existing disciplinary standards to determine what should and should not be funded. This may mean that at the end of the day, interdisciplinary scholarship is evaluated through several disciplinary lenses. That is the conclusion my colleagues and I reached in our study of cognitive contextualization and the production of fair judgments within interdisciplinary panels.¹⁶ Of course, more research is needed in this area, particularly concerning the creation and evaluation of shared interdisciplinary cognitive platforms.¹⁷ We also need to understand better the weak institutionalization of interdisciplinary criteria of evaluation in the face of considerable available funding, governmental mandates for interdisciplinary research, and industry's appreciation of it. Is ambiguity inherent to the genre?

While "good" interdisciplinary evaluation calls for a very distinct, if rare, combination of expertise, "good" diversity evaluation raises questions of a different order. These have to do with fundamental principles—how to reconcile evaluation based on merit, on the one hand, and evaluation based on needs and distributive justice, on the other.

Including Diversity Criteria

Many studies demonstrate the relatively few women and minority faculty members in the most prestigious levels of academia—in particular, tenured positions at research universities that have high levels of influence and productivity.¹⁸ Although faculty diversity is increasing, unequal access to higher education continues to affect the pipeline.¹⁹ It is against this background that diversity considerations affect all forms of selection in American higher education, ranging from law school admissions and department tenure decisions, to the awarding of fellowships.

Just as with interdisciplinarity, some of the funding agencies in-

cluded in this study explicitly require that panelists do not discriminate. For instance, the website for the American Council for Learned Societies asserts:

In the administration and awarding of its fellowships and grants, the ACLS does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, age, religion, disability, marital/family status, or political affiliation. Applications are particularly invited from women and members of minority groups. Younger scholars and independent scholars who do not hold academic appointments are also encouraged to apply.²⁰

Other funding organizations are less specific. For instance, the website of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, sponsor of the Women's Studies competition, simply states, "Since its earliest days, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation has broken barriers and opened doors for students whose access to the best educational opportunities had been limited. Woodrow Wilson continues to meet the nation's needs to cultivate young leaders who truly represent all Americans."²¹ Two of the funding agencies do not mention diversity. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to expect that all panelists take it into consideration when making awards; diversity's relevance to academic evaluation is widely acknowledged in settings where panel members typically perform their day-to-day work as evaluators of colleagues and students. While they are generally asked only not to discriminate, diversity is often actively factored into decision making.

Promoting Many Diversities: Why and How

Panelists appear to favor an expansive definition of diversity that does not privilege race or gender, and that aims to promote diversity within academia because it is perceived as an intrinsic good, leading

Table 6.1 Percent of panelists per disciplinary cluster who mention diversity as a criterion

<i>Types of diversity</i>	<i>Humanities</i> (<i>N</i> = 22)	<i>History</i> (<i>N</i> = 20)	<i>Social sciences</i> (<i>N</i> = 29)	<i>Total</i> (<i>N</i> = 71)
Institutional	9 (41%)	8 (40%)	8 (28%)	25 (35%)
Disciplinary	7 (32%)	9 (45%)	8 (28%)	24 (34%)
Topics	6 (27%)	9 (45%)	5 (17%)	20 (28%)
Gender	0 (0%)	5 (25%)	6 (21%)	11 (15%)
Ethno-racial	4 (18%)	3 (15%)	3 (10%)	10 (14%)
Geographic	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Total	27 (1.2*)	34 (1.7**)	30 (1.03**)	91**

Note: A "mention" occurs when a criterion is used during the interview.

* This number represents the ratio of mention per panelist. While some respondents mentioned each type of diversity more than once, their concern is registered only once for each diversity type.

**Some panelists mentioned two types of diversity. Thus, the total number of mentions is greater than the total number of panelists.

to a richer academic experience for all and to a broader production of talent for society as a whole.²² Panelists do consider the racial and gender diversity of the awardees, but they also weigh their geographical location, the types of institutions where they teach (public/private, elite/nonelite, colleges/research universities), and the range of disciplines they hail from. Which kind of diversity is privileged from case to case is an object of negotiation among panel members. As shown in Table 6.1, around 34 percent of the interviewees mention institutional diversity and disciplinary diversity as criteria of evaluation, compared to only about 15 percent who mention ethno-racial or gender diversity. Diversity in topics is also a popular criterion. Only one respondent mentions geographic diversity.

Historians are most concerned with diversity in topics and disciplinary diversity (this may reflect noblesse oblige, given that historians reap the lion's share of the awards and submit a very large number of proposals). Social scientists are the least concerned with these two dimensions. Surprisingly, the humanists do not mention gender diversity, while, as the table shows, this is a relatively strong factor

among historians and social scientists. Mentions of ethno-racial diversity are roughly equal across disciplinary clusters. Overall, the concern for diversity is strongest among historians (with a ratio of 1.7 mentions per respondent in this cluster, compared to 1.2 among humanists, and 1.03 among social scientists). It should be mentioned that while panelists have access to information concerning applicants' disciplinary affiliation, gender, institutional affiliation (and its geographic location), and research topic, they often have to guess ethno-racial identity based on applicants' past awards (for example, having received minority fellowships) and affiliations (such as membership in the Association of Black Sociologists).

Given the many forms of diversity and the relatively low salience of ethno-racial diversity as compared to disciplinary and institutional diversity, it is not surprising that when asked how much importance should be attached to diversity as a criterion of selection, an African-American scholar responds by referring to projects emanating from private and public universities as well as to competitions that target "younger scholars or ethnic minorities." He explicitly views policies aiming to promote racial diversity as exemplifying the promotion of a much broader principle of diversity. Some respondents go even further. A history professor says, "I do believe in having a mix, as much of a mix as possible, as much diversity of whatever kind. And that includes diversity of background or training or interest or maybe even age or personality." Framing the funding of women and people of color as the extension of a broader principle minimizes what could be perceived as an antinomy between promoting excellence and fairness. Since the 1980s, a similar trend has developed in other fields, such as organizational management, partly in response to federal cutbacks in affirmative action and equal opportunity regulations.²³

Pro-diversity arguments are made by evoking not only the intrinsic value of diversity, but also the need to level the playing field and overcome biases (rationales that are often combined) in order to

bring out the best work. "It's important for foundations such as these to encourage the production of as wide a range of knowledge as possible," one English scholar asserts, explaining that this process "helps us check some of the biases that we as evaluators may bring in. And I think it also allows us to 'level the playing field.' That's a metaphor that gets used often in terms of racial or class diversity, which I totally think is important." An African-American panelist also defends factoring in diversity by appealing to fairness in light of this uneven playing field. As he notes, "You've got people applying who teach at institutions where they have much heavier teaching loads and haven't had opportunities to publish as much. It is often the case that their proposals may not look as slick and polished—I should say 'polished,' I shouldn't say 'slick.' They may not have been able to maintain connections to leaders in the field whose names carry some kind of weight or who may have some kind of facility with letters of recommendation."

Still other panel members are concerned with the role that fellowships play in shaping the academic pipeline and in determining what the professoriate will look like in the next decades. According to a self-identified liberal historian:

Since [the competition] is a gateway to the academy, I'm interested in seeing the academy have more than just white, upper-middle-class, careerist professionals [who] essentially come at this with a kind of dogged, mandarin-like desire to reproduce themselves in the academy . . . It's nice to see somebody [who] did different work, older candidates and young candidates . . . if at the end of the day you've essentially given a license to a group of people [to] fill out the academy with very different personalit[ies] and different backgrounds, that's . . . a massive plus.

As Lani Guinier and Susan Sturm point out, critics of affirmative action today find it easy to pit meritocracy against diversity, arguing

that some "get in by merit," while others do so "by quota."²⁴ The case of peer review suggests another perspective, one where considerations of quality and diversity are combined to identify potential awardees. Awards are made to applicants who shine in both dimensions, even if in varying proportions; thus, I argue that merit and diversity often act as complementary criteria, rather than as alternative standards of evaluation. Consider how the promotion of diversity is typically accomplished in funding decisions. Arguments about diversity are rarely salient when the first awards are made—the awards around which strong consensus emerges rapidly. Such arguments are more likely to be advanced when the "maybe" proposals are discussed. In these cases, diversity, in its various forms, may act as a tie-breaker between two somewhat faulty—but each differently faulty and thus not easily commensurable—proposals, and thereby help "move things along." An evaluator who describes the self-monitoring process in which her panel was engaged gives an example. After members noted that they seemed to be funding a disproportionately large number of proposals by historians, the panel took corrective action: "Certain projects were included in our top list by taking into consideration field diversity as well as other kinds of [criteria, such as] institutional range, geographical range, all of which I think are very important categories." As an African-American English professor summarizes the situation: "Some [winners] are there because of questions having to do with field diversity and a diversity of kind of institutions, because [there is] less of a consensus about the qualities of the proposal. In other cases, there's more of a consensus that the project is suitable."

Note that those who benefit from diversity considerations may have had to overcome additional hurdles and stigmas based on their institutional affiliation, class, race, or nativity to join the pool of contestants. That these applicants' trajectory may have been steeper suggests perhaps their greater determination and potential to succeed compared to applicants from more privileged backgrounds.

Panelists are aware that they apply different standards as the group's deliberations progress beyond the few proposals for which a consensus is reached rather quickly. An English scholar states:

We all talked about weaknesses in [the last six] in ways we hadn't talked about [the others] . . . This is one where the topic may have been the criterion that made the difference, and this speaks to the affirmative action business. I'm comfortable with saying, "The top six are decided on this academic excellence, and then there are other factors that have more weight with the others" . . . Taking the other criteria into account [is important] . . . We're talking about relevance of study, how important a study is to a particular field, or many fields at this particular point in time, how much it's needed.

Thus consistency in the use of rules competes with other considerations as the panelists assess and reassess what constitutes a fair process for the group of proposals as a whole.

"Excellence versus Diversity"

Whether it is appropriate to "factor in" diversity criteria remains a contentious question among many academics, because many are unaware that most decisions are *de facto* based on a combination of excellence and diversity considerations. Purists argue that only excellence should be considered in the distribution of awards.²⁵ An economist, for instance, is skeptical of panels' ability to accommodate diversity considerations ("it's only under a very unlikely roll of the dice that you would get talent"). He argues that

Academia is intrinsically an elitist enterprise. We don't let everybody into college in this country; we don't let everybody into grad school; we don't give everybody a tenure track job; we don't ten-

ure everybody. And that's a good thing . . . It's kind of like a popular feel-good urge to say, "Let's root for the underdog and hope they win." I think you should fund underdogs if they've got a good proposal.

Anticipating such objections, "progressive" panelists introduce nuances in the collective conversation around these issues. For instance, an English professor argues that producing diverse knowledge fosters excellence and should not be equated with a lowering of standards. Others take a strong stance in favor of combining types of criteria. Thus a political scientist explains, "Well, it's healthy when there are competing criteria put forward vigorously in dialogue with one another. And I think it's healthy to temper your own criteria with consideration of alternative criteria. I think where we get into trouble is where one set of criteria, whether it's excellence or diversity or what have you, are used to the exclusion of all other criteria." Still others seem to want to promote diversity, but within limits, and on a case-by-case basis, as this English professor suggests:

We shouldn't run a place on some abstract idea, or a contextualist idea of academic excellence, because that would privilege one class of people and it wouldn't do anything for diversity. How far one strays from academic excellence to meet the other goals, you probably have to do that pragmatically, case by case, moment by moment. But I think it should be done.

In promoting greater racial and gender diversity among awardees, some panelists purposefully aim to break down the opposition between "standards of excellence" and "diversity standards." A prominent feminist who has served for many years on panels at the National Endowment for the Humanities and the American Association of University Women recalls promoting women academics and wo-

men's studies proposals at a time when these organizations were not inclined to fund them. She explains that she "would not argue for them as women's studies projects, but as being excellent," stating that over time general standards of excellence and standards pertaining to feminist scholarship have converged, so that now they are nearly indistinguishable. Speaking of the Woodrow Wilson Women's Studies competition, she says:

To me, to win one of these [fellowships], you can't have one without the other . . . Women's studies scholars . . . really do have to master more. Because you could be very good, say, in seventeenth-century literature, and not pay any attention to women . . . But to win in this competition, you would have to not only master that field, but also master the feminist theory that speaks to that field. And I think they're absolutely crucial, they've got to have both.

Speaking of her own past, she recalls, "I had to be excellent in the standard fields and then be excellent in women's studies . . . Some of the people who had done more conventional work [in the past] chalked it up to, 'Oh, well, she does feminist stuff and that's really hot.'" That this panelist and others have experienced strong tensions between (not to mention discrimination over) being appreciated for high-quality scholarship and doing innovative work that contributes to the institutionalization of a new field speaks to the pervasive and far-reaching drama of diversity in academic evaluation.

Perspectives on Diversity: Panelists of Color

I conducted nine interviews with nonwhite panelists—seven African-American and two Asian evaluators. As in the larger group of respondents, here too I found significant variation in the approach to diversity as a criterion of selection. At one end of the spectrum, one

panelist explicitly aims to ensure that diversity in all its manifestations is represented among the winners: "My agenda was to make sure that the list reflected some diversity in terms of demographics, you know, the representation of different kinds of schools, different fields, and ideally, scholars of color." At the opposite extreme, another panelist mentions that her panel did not explicitly apply diversity criteria: "We were pretty much going through and randomly judging each application on its own merits. There was no discussion of 'Well, we have too many history or we have too many of this.' There seemed to be no reason then to discuss race if you're just going through and making a determination just based on the individual projects and not other considerations." This same panelist, however, reports that during her second year on the panel, when the discussion turned to which of the proposals ranked "2" (the "maybe" category) should receive funding, she sought to promote underrepresented topics and applicants of color. "[I supported] topics that spoke to interests that I thought were not well represented in a pool of applications we had already supported . . . [and whose authors] themselves are in underrepresented groups."

It is nearly impossible to determine whether white and nonwhite panelists are equally likely to interpret diversity questions as pertaining to race, given the considerable variation that exists within each group. Moreover, because academics in the social sciences and the humanities are, overall, progressive, the promotion of diversity may very well be so taken for granted among panelists that there seems to be no need to explicitly discuss it. (As a sociologist puts it, "The people on the committee were nice and progressive people, so in our minds there was no [need for a] straightforward discussion of that.")²⁶ Nevertheless, we find positions among whites that are absent among nonwhites. For instance, one white panelist, an anthropologist, opposes any consideration of race because doing so seems patronizing toward nonwhites and to promote privileged people of color:

In my university, we are about to make an offer to someone, a woman from India who's from a high caste and probably grew up with twelve servants and so on, but she's considered under a special minority hiring. We can hire her without any search for a position that doesn't otherwise exist. I find that totally baffling. Certainly, if there were any evidence again of bias against minorities, that would be something to root out, but I just haven't encountered that . . . In other words, if we're not using the same standard, whatever that is, I'd be worried about being patronizing—you know, "Well, I've got to lower the standard, it's a black candidate."

Very few panelists mention class diversity. They do not appear to question that middle-class students, who are generally better endowed culturally for academic success through various forms of transmitted cultural capital, will be privileged in most academic selections. One interviewee, however, notes:

[Class diversity] is a deep problem for the American university in that gradually and [despite] many different kinds of efforts, the pool of people going into the humanities is becoming less diverse, wealthier, and more established—I don't know the situation in the social sciences. When you make a selection like this, you're already selecting from what is mostly [a] bourgeois group of very privileged people who have gone to elite universities and colleges, even if they didn't come from the elite . . . There were people from Harvard and Wellesley, but there was also a kid from Berkeley who supported himself managing a Barnes and Noble. So it was very good to see that we had a real range.

Awareness of Gender Bias

Social science research has contributed important findings on gender discrimination in scholarly performance evaluations.²⁷ For in-

stance, a widely cited study of peer-reviewed evaluations of post-doctoral research applications shows that reviewers consistently gave female applicants lower average scores than male applicants, despite similar levels of productivity.²⁸ More broadly, we know that men's traits are generally viewed as more valuable than women's, and that men are generally judged as more competent.²⁹ In addition, women academics are often perceived as "less productive and/or incapable of succeeding in full-time, tenure-track positions," which results in women's performances being subject to both more scrutiny and higher standards than the performances of comparable men.³⁰ "Attribution biases" are frequent; these occur when "people tend to attribute the behavior of members of their in-group to stable causes, while they attribute the behavior of out-groups to situational causes: he's brilliant, but she just got lucky."³¹ Such biases are especially likely in situations of tokenism, for example, when there are only a few women in a department or within a rank. Social categorization and same-group ("in-group") biases that lead to attribution biases are part of normal cognition, and they occur regardless of people's conscious feelings toward other groups.³² Only continual self-evaluation, time, and systems of accountability can redirect these cognitive tendencies.

These findings inform the scholarship of some of the panelists, several of whom are well versed in the literature on gender inequality in academia. For instance, a political scientist explains that men may be more likely to dismiss the work of women colleagues as "not interesting," and that such appraisals "would obviously be a case of kind of bias . . . it would be rare that you'll find that the people who are different from you are doing things that you rate more highly." Also aware of the literature on bias, a historian, when asked how he deals with questions of diversity as he evaluates proposals, answers: "I [don't] foreground them, but I try to take them into serious consideration . . . After I've gone through a batch of proposals I look for a pattern. Are the ones that I'm scoring higher distinguished by gen-

der, by discipline, [by being] at research universities, and so forth?" This panelist also recalls the panel as a whole being sensitive to bias. He provided the example of a time when "someone remarked, 'Hey, two of the last three were not at major universities.' And suddenly somebody attended to that matter, and we said, 'Yes, that is true.' We wanted to make sure we were not blindly ignoring those kinds of things."

Others focus on some of the more subtle ways that gender influences evaluation. For instance, one sociologist, citing the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron on "strategies of relegation" (or self-tracking) among working-class students, suggests that women may be less likely to win fellowships because they deliberately choose more traditional topics and "safer" professional strategies.³³ Another woman, an anthropologist serving on the Society of Fellows panel, notes that men interview much better than women; they are more at ease. "[There is the] male interview style, [which is more] persuasive, and the certain female interview style, not quite as pushy. It's not necessarily apologetic, but just not as strong. They seem not good and that's something we have to watch out for." Alternatively, she notes that women often lose points because they are perceived as too aggressive, in line with findings that ambitious women are penalized if they claim rewards for their achievements.³⁴ Indeed, studies indicate that when men are assertive, their behavior is perceived as evidence of great talent, but when women exhibit the same behavior, they are seen as being too aggressive. Similarly, men and women who engage in "self-promotion" are often viewed in different ways, with the men admired for their accomplishments, while the women are seen as arrogant.³⁵

Finally, indirect biases arise from the fact that women often privilege qualitative research and constructivist epistemological approaches. Elisabeth Clemens and her colleagues show that in sociology, women are proportionately more likely than men to write books, especially

books that use qualitative data.³⁶ A panel that favors quantitative work over qualitative work could thus put women at a disadvantage. In comparing the epistemological styles valued by panelists, my colleagues and I found that women were more likely to use a constructivist style than men.³⁷ A panel that values more a positivist epistemological style would thus also put women at a slight disadvantage. In these cases, discrimination results not from direct gender bias but from adopting criteria of selection that are slanted in favor of men.³⁸ Considered together, these factors suggest a possible "cumulative advantage" that works in favor of men—a possibility heightened by the presence of additional influences, such as those discussed in Chapter 5 (for example, letters of recommendation for male applicants appear to be more detailed and make a stronger impression on panelists).³⁹ Similar factors may also increase the likelihood of tenure for men as compared to women. A comparative study of young men and women academic stars could potentially reveal contrasting patterns in the role played by mentors, the passing on of privileges, and the advantages provided by having a stay-at-home partner and other informal resources.

Institutional Affirmative Action

As its name indicates, the American Council for Learned Societies is an organization of national associations. It serves a highly diverse membership. The participating associations represent those working in public and private universities, elite and nonelite universities, research universities and liberal arts colleges, institutions with heavy or light teaching loads, and universities located in less central areas. For those serving on the ACLS's panel, therefore, diversity concerns are salient. This umbrella organization wants its distribution of awards to reflect the diverse morphology of American higher education, including its geographical dispersion and the various categories of institutions. A representational logic is not strictly applied, but it is a

factor. In this organization, distributing awards across the associations' various constituencies is a matter not only of fairness, but also of organizational efficacy.

Other competitions also ask their panelists to take institutional diversity into consideration when making awards, as this panelist indicates:

We had the usual injunction from the program officer that we should be careful to consider underrepresented institutions as one extra plus in a proposal's favor, though not to [the extent that it would] cancel out [other negative attributes] if we thought the proposal was weak. And equally, if we saw that we were over-rewarding to any given institution, to recall that. He said the way we should think about it is, we don't want all the Michigan or Columbia people in one year; we want the best of their cohort. And that means, of course, in a way, [that] the person [who's] fifth in line at Columbia in our imaginations might [have turned] out to be first in line if they [had been] at, you know, SUNY-New Paltz.

During post-deliberation interviews, more than a third of the panelists mentioned institutional "affirmative action" as a criterion of evaluation. Much as panelists are encouraged to follow the rule of cognitive contextualism by applying the epistemological style most appropriate to the applicant's field (see Chapter 4), funding program officers urge them to apply different standards depending on the resources available at the applicant's institution and the applicant's career stage. An English scholar working in women's studies describes how she factors in institutional criteria:

I'm going to cut someone less slack if they're at Rutgers or some other institution that has a lot of women's studies, or at Maryland, but [if she's] stuck at Northern Illinois or is out in Utah where there is a lot of hostility to feminist issues . . . where it's

open hostility that may even sometimes involve violence, I think, man, this person has really worked to get as far as she has. And if what she has done is excellent and there's promise that it will continue to be, then I say, that's a good affirmative action.

Panelists practice institutional affirmative action because they believe that private, elite, and research-focused universities are privileged in the competition process. For instance, an English professor observes: "When we finally looked at our final ten awards, we were chagrined that they were almost all to people at major research universities, or at places where the teaching load was probably relatively low . . . We didn't judge ourselves, but I think we had some talk about that as the proposals went by." Similarly, a political scientist says about funded projects in her field:

It didn't please me so much that three of the four political science ones went to Berkeley. I have nothing against that. I actually think Berkeley's a great place; I went there . . . I think that Berkeley does train fabulous comparative political scientists . . . But . . . you'd like to see a number of schools succeeding.

Top institutions often put an array of resources at the disposal of applicants—including internal graduate research fellowship competitions, closer mentoring, and more extensive graduate course offerings. One panelist notes, "Occasionally you get a proposal from someone that is really off the beaten track of these research universities. Clearly, they are at a big disadvantage both in not having colleagues around to help and not having the help to talk about the proposal, just not being well-informed about the kind of research method that goes on." This same person adds:

Once a student enters a second- or third-rate program and works with someone who's totally unknown, you know, even though

they might in fact have as good qualities as anybody else, they're going to be at a major disadvantage. Partly because for graduate students, it's very hard to evaluate their training other than by these kinds of institutional means.

Demonstrating the Matthew effect, according to which capital goes to capital, being affiliated with a prestigious university can keep a proposal above the bar.⁴⁰ A sociologist describes this phenomenon while discussing a project by a scholar of China who teaches at the University of Pennsylvania:

I know that Chinese literature at Penn is very highly regarded, and she can't be a dummy doing this particular kind of work, and it was a beautiful proposal . . . This is a subject that if she had been from some tiny little hole-in-the-wall college, it's not likely, I don't think. For me, I mean. I don't know about the others because we didn't really talk about these subtleties. But I know in my case, when I see where she is, and she's a professor, which they don't give out so much, I assume that this must be a very good person.

Scholars working at elite universities have a more nuanced view of differences among institutions at the top, particularly with respect to how they prepare students for competitive fellowships. A historian of China says:

People from Harvard get no advice of any kind, whereas at Stanford they have to submit draft after draft and they get all these comments . . . It's like teaching people to the test; it's not necessarily something we want to encourage . . . in the end, I want our first emphasis to be along excellence. But we have to sort of add points for certain kinds of diversity because in the end that promotes more excellence than allowing this to devolve into the control of just a few institutions.

For an English scholar, the solution is to fund "people from other than Ivy League or Research I institutions, people from sort of smaller colleges, who might not have had access to research support and might be read as 'under-published.' Also people from different parts of the country, people from ethnic studies, if possible, that kind of thing."

Panelists also sometimes suggest limiting fellowships for applicants who have already received them in the past. This is a sensitive issue, in part because track record is read as indicating excellence, and in part because it raises the issue of need. Assessing need is largely framed as illegitimate—panelists do not even mention it as a consideration. Still, tensions exist around whether it should be factored in. The legitimacy of need, like that of institutional affirmative action, turns on distributive justice, which is a different principle of allocation than that of merit.⁴¹ At the center of the debates is whether scholars who have access to many resources should get more, or whether those who have access to very little should be advantaged. One panelist, a sociologist, argues strongly against institutional affirmative action because he believes that the distribution of the cultural and social capital that come with institutional affiliation cannot easily be manipulated:

The chair of our panel seemed to be quite keen on [promoting] underrepresented institutions. I tend not to be all that sympathetic to that argument. It's stupid to be prejudiced against, say, people who are pursuing advanced graduate work at Oklahoma State. But it may very well be that, for example, just to pick a topic out of the hat, if you want to do a study of [a] nineteenth-century French critique of bureaucracy, . . . maybe it's not the best place to pursue that kind of work, given that there aren't adequate faculty members, you know, infrastructures or what not. So by and large, [it's] an unfortunate fact of life that other things being equal, someone who went to Stanford and studied with Keith Baker or

whoever would probably be better off, and it's kind of silly to try to amend that.

Self-interest influences the position that some scholars take on the question of institutional affirmative action. A panelist who teaches at UCLA believes that the funding competitions are biased against public school students:

At UCLA you see a lot of bright people, but they're coming out of miserable school systems . . . They are not going to rise to the top in a competition like SSRC . . . [neither will] somebody who goes through a program that doesn't have a rigorous sort of theoretical background. So that sort of biases it against like Big Ten type schools, the UC system as a public school system. But it puts a lot more emphasis I think on the very schools that keep getting funded—Chicago, Harvard, the Ivy League schools, as well as Berkeley.

Affirmative Action Regarding Research Topics

Two of the funding competitions privilege specific types of research: that emanating from the field of women's studies (the WWNFF competition); and comparative work (the SSRC's International Dissertation Field Research competition). These competitions instruct panelists to consider potential contributions to these specific areas when evaluating proposals. But beyond these explicit and organizationally specific foci, some panelists favor topics of scholarship that they particularly value, and which they believe are neglected. This is what I call "substantive affirmative action." A political scientist who promotes it in the name of originality says:

Non-Western subjects, we felt an obligation to give those a kind of extra advantage . . . Opening up scholarship in relatively un-

touched areas seems to me a good thing to do. Some of the applications that I remember being very beautifully crafted fell lower in the rankings, either overall or just in my view, because they were going over such familiar ground. And even if the person was brilliant and had something somewhat original to say about it, I would end up feeling that this is less important work overall than scholarship in some area that Western scholars just don't have any exposure to.

Feminist scholarship and "non-Western topics" frequently are portrayed as having been historically neglected or "marginalized." Feminist research has been circumscribed by a tradition of gender-neutral scholarship that ignores the gendered character of all aspects of social life; non-Western topics have been hampered by a Eurocentric scholarly tradition that privileges "the West" over all other areas.⁴² Both also are likely to be identified by more conservative forces as politically correct pet topics of the academic left, along with critical subaltern studies, antipositivist research, and work that addresses antiglobalization and environmentalism.

The earlier work of Everett Carl Ladd Jr. and Seymour Martin Lipset, as well as the more recent work of sociologists Neil Gross and Solon Simmons, shows how politically progressive academics are overall, especially in the social sciences and the humanities.⁴³ Thus it is hardly surprising that quality and social justice are conflated at times. Academics who see their research as contributing in very significant ways to the production of social representations are concerned with giving voice to subordinate, neglected, or marginal groups. This type of social contribution has become particularly valued since the 1980s, with the growing influence of "history from below" in cultural history; of the Birmingham School (with its focus on resistance) in English, cultural studies, sociology, and anthropology; and with parallel developments in political theory (where the

influence of critical theory remains pronounced). Of course, the development of women's studies has also had an important, independent influence as an extraordinarily dynamic interdisciplinary and disciplinary field.⁴⁴

Panelists offer a wide range of reasons for privileging scholarship emanating from women's studies or from feminist perspectives. Some appeal to homophilic preferences—where excellence is what looks most like one's own work (see Chapter 4)—but the "social usefulness of knowledge" is mentioned as well. An English professor well-known for her feminist scholarship explains:

I certainly followed my own scholarly enthusiasm; I gave high marks to "feminist" projects or projects focusing on gender . . . Gender is a very important way in which the world and cultures are organized. Even though gender scholarship has been in the academy for twenty or thirty years, I still think that it's insufficiently integrated into many scholars' understanding of the world. So I'm very happy when I see projects that incorporate gender as part of their analytic equipment.

Feminist scholarship also is sometimes promoted on the grounds that in some quarters this type of work is the target of ridicule and discrimination. One anthropologist notes, "I've served on a lot of committees now with political scientists in my own institution, and in a couple of cases cross-institutionally, and [they were] very hostile to feminist work and women's work." An English scholar who noted little opposition to gender proposals on her panel reasons that other panelists may have felt "guilty" or been "embarrassed to admit" that they had little interest in feminist work. She contrasts this with the situation in her department, where "people make no bones about disparaging feminist scholarship. They do that very freely."

Precisely because some panelists explicitly privilege feminist

scholarship, proposals that receive such support can be construed as substandard by unsympathetic panelists. A political scientist describes his reaction to a women's studies proposal:

This proposal that I thought was really badly done might have gone through because they were giving this woman a break. It was related to a women's studies question, her thesis. She was a woman. She was coming from a real second-tier institution. But it was a project in an area of women's studies that clearly needed more research and everything. So . . .

Feminist research is valued in part because it serves practical purposes and is meant to have a transformative social role. This standard of evaluation, however, is rejected by those panelists who value the production of knowledge as an end in itself (typically, the same panelists who espouse comprehensive or positivist epistemological styles). These opposing understandings of the purpose of research create tension. An anthropologist who directed a program in women's studies for several years notes that "women's studies people" frequently are in "a defensive battle [where] they are having to say that 'feminist' doesn't mean that academic excellence is lowered." Despite the field's increased legitimacy, "Some people are still going to bridle at the preface 'feminist' because they're going to think, 'Well, if it's related to a cause, then it can't be necessarily trustworthy.'"

The tension is not only over the aim of knowledge, but also over conceptions of objectivity and of "positionality" in the production of high-quality research. Because positivism as an epistemological style requires bracketing the relationship between the researcher and her topic, it is incompatible with developments in feminist research, whereas standpoint theory emphasizes that one's relationship with the object of study defines the lens through which the research is

conducted—a position that gives greater latitude to feminist-oriented scholarship.⁴⁵

A different logic is applied to substantive affirmative action directed toward non-Western subjects. While preferences for certain topics and perspectives in these areas could be seen as idiosyncratic, panelists legitimize them on substantive grounds (for example, by referring to breadth, originality, or scholarly significance), and do so using the language of expertise. A historian of China, for instance, emphasizes intellectual breadth when she defines diversity in opposition to Eurocentrism: "I would really welcome people who knew there was something besides the Euro-American, Western tradition and could work on it . . . I feel it's my job to make those points, and I don't feel that they're necessarily very strongly influential. It's more like a little tweak or a nag."

She adds to the formal criteria used by the funding program a criterion of her own:

Awareness of the [intellectual] world beyond their focus . . . It's not just international. Many people are extremely either . . . usually Eurocentric . . . or Americano-centric . . . It's very common in the academy, but I like to point it out when I find it and I consider it a sign of narrowness . . . [I dislike] the pomposity of people who make sweeping [statements] always . . . based on Europe. As a person who's been in the China field for thirty or forty years, it's very annoying. It just shows their ignorance.

Another panelist, a sociologist, admits that for him, "There are absolutely some areas which are pet areas." He favors proposals that address these topics and geographic areas not for personal reasons, but because they make accessible materials that are otherwise "hard to find."

At the same time, some panelists refuse to engage in substantive

affirmative action because doing so seems ill-advised, like favoring proposals that emanate from one's own field. One respondent firmly rejects factoring this diversification of topics into his own thinking about what to fund:

There's no way I will be able to figure that into my reading . . . I don't have information [to make such judgments]. Even if I have the information, would I say, "OK, there are already ten people who study South Korea and this proposal is well written, but there are already ten people, and therefore I will grade it low?" [Doing that] just doesn't make sense to me.

This scholar prefers to grade on quality only, but he admits that later in the deliberative process, other factors are taken into consideration: "Then we shuffle them and put them together . . . At that level, I'm not judging them on the basis of quality, I'm just judging them on the basis of representation, and I would feel extremely fine [about it]." Separating the "real evaluation" from the negotiated rankings is a conceptual framework that allows panelists to protect the sanctity of the process (see Chapter 4).

Similarly, as a political scientist's comments suggest, by combining evaluative rationales—those related to expertise as well as to social justice—panelists can preserve legitimacy while incorporating diversity criteria. He describes his support for a proposal in archeology this way:

[The proposal] was the only one I read in archeology, and so part of it was simply trying to widen the spectrum of people [whom] we funded. But it wasn't just simply a quota system, getting an archeologist in the group photo. He made a pretty reasonable case that when anthropologists and cultural historians have studied Islam, they tended to derive most of their understandings about

medieval Islam from the urban environment. By looking at this particular spatial location . . . in terms of the mixture of different influences, cultural influences, one could have a very different understanding about the nature of medieval Islam . . . I liked the multi-dimensionality of the project.

Partly because they are interdisciplinary disciplines that concern "diverse" populations, fields such as women's studies, African-American studies, and ethnic studies struggle to keep from being pushed to the periphery, or to the bottom of the academic totem pole. The same is true of other interdisciplinary fields, such as cultural studies.⁴⁶ That so much uncertainty remains about how to insert considerations of diversity and interdisciplinarity into scholarly evaluation underscores the fact that older, more established disciplines continue to define the rules of the game, contributing to the fragility of these fields.

Conclusion

Interdisciplinarity and diversity are among the main challenges that American higher education faces at the beginning of the twenty-first century. While interdisciplinarity has been a permanent feature of tertiary education ever since disciplines began to compete with one another to maximize their jurisdictional claims, the challenge of diversity has become even more pronounced since the 1960s, as various groups have piggy-backed on the hard-won gains that African Americans have made toward greater inclusion.⁴⁷ While elite institutions have become more diverse, conflicting visions persist, and these reverberate in panel dynamics.

Because of the very elite character of academic research, tensions around diversity may be intrinsic to American higher education, which itself is pulled between its democratic mission, the pursuit of

knowledge, and market pressures.⁴⁸ Because so many social scientists and humanists are liberal or progressive, they are also concerned that the elite not be favored at the expense of meritocracy. As an anthropologist puts it, "Those who have famous advisers and are at [the] top three or four universities will be ranked higher than people who aren't, even if the quality of the proposal is the same. It seems to me there's far too much elitism and just [a] sort of favoritism."

Perhaps there is something distinctively American in how these tensions are experienced, something that is linked to the sheer size of the higher education system, to its spatial dispersion, and to its institutional diversity and its uniquely wide-ranging sociodemographic variations. That American panelists deploy so much energy to elaborate positions with regard to diversity that are nuanced and compatible indicates how aware they are of the sheer complexity of the academic world they inhabit. Their attentiveness to the issue contrasts with the situation in most European countries, where higher education systems are smaller and more homogeneous, and thus less subject to a complicated weighing of nontraditional considerations like diversity when academic achievements are evaluated. In these countries, considerations such as spreading the riches across types of institutions do not arise to the same degree. For example, the British reform of evaluation processes imposed during the 1980s promoted a straightforward application of meritocratic standards that allowed no consideration of needs and distributive fairness, in response in part to the historically ascriptive system of distribution that favored elite institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge.⁴⁹

Despite its democratic impulse, the sheer size of the American system, along with the entrenched hierarchy of institutions that characterize it, may doom efforts to free it of ongoing elitism. A British

panelist notes how American students from better universities are privileged:

They've got all the best professors anyway. For example, people talk about, "Well, you know, so and so is our supervisor, so that would give me confidence that the work will be done even despite the doubts about it," and that's so inside-knowledge. But it's also an assumption about the role between the supervisor and the student.

Nevertheless, the claims regularly made by lower-rank universities for privileging justice-inflected alternative principles of distribution are certainly a force for social change. This is the case notably within professional associations such as the American Sociological Association, where elections to important committees make room for various subcategories of candidates, including sociologists working in four-year institutions, as well as applied sociologists. The response to a push from within the American Political Science Association for a similar approach, however, is a vivid reminder that dilemmas of democracy are handled very differently across disciplines. Segments of the APSA's top leadership resisted this suggestion, preferring to maintain the status quo, whereby members simply rubber-stamp a list of nominees chosen by members of the discipline's elite—although this list does include individuals teaching in a range of types of institutions. These two different disciplinary responses, which continue to generate much angst within segments of each discipline, clearly demonstrate how meritocracy and democracy often operate as antinomic principles within the context of American higher education. That academics are struggling so hard—or not struggling at all—to reconcile them speaks volumes about their importance as buttresses to the structure of our academic world. In addition, that

these two principles exist in tension helps us understand why so often excellence and diversity do not function as alternative criteria of evaluation, but as additive, complementary factors—despite popular perceptions and rhetorical attacks against affirmative action and other policies aimed at promoting diversity within higher education. Like excellence, diversity appears to have become a moral imperative of the system—another manifestation of what is sacred in American academia.⁵⁰